

POEMS AND PLAYS

GERTRUDE BUCK



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POEMS AND PLAYS





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BY
GERTRUDE BUCK

Edited by
LAURA JOHNSON WYLIE



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(The contents of this volume are, as far as possible, arranged in chronological order.)

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PREFACE

An introduction to such a volume as this may seem an impertinence; what the author has to say must speak for itself and to its fitting audience. Yet the editor cannot let the book go out without a word as to the life-long interest of Gertrude Buck in imaginative writing and the part played by this interest in her intellectual and practical life. She was, even to her friends, primarily the teacher, the thinker, the administrator, remarkable for constant and energetic advance towards new ends or for unflagging zeal in working out new experiments. But, however apparently absorbed in such tasks, she lived always to a surprising degree outside and beyond them; was from first to last, as artist and poet, most deeply concerned with shaping into form some mood or character, some situation or idea, that had touched her imagination. This creative impulse, moreover, grew with her growth, gave tone and character to everything she did, and in turn changed direction as she gained in maturity and in intellectual and emotional experience.

There was never a time when Miss Buck was not directly occupied with some piece of imaginative writing. Her literary experiments began in her school days. Before she was graduated from college, she was recognized as a successful newspaper writer and a poet remarkable among her contemporaries for delicacy of technique and range and depth of emotion. Throughout her professional years, she found in the writing of verse or novel or play not only illumination of literary theory, but a counterpoise to the distracting demands of practical life. Almost her last definite plan was the completion of a novel dealing with contemporary social and academic

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conditions, laid aside a few years before in the stress of a developing interest in drama. The strength of her imaginative bent showed itself throughout her life in the use she made of such scanty leisure as came to her. A few days of vacation were prized less that she might hear or see some new thing than because in them her imagination, released from daily service, could work out some one of the many themes always revolving in her mind.

This persistence of the artistic impulse in her was the more remarkable because she responded whole-heartedly to calls, individual and social, that might easily have absorbed all her energy. She began her career as a teacher just when the rapidly increasing number of students in Vassar was rendering the faculty acutely conscious of the need to reconstruct its educational theory and practice. The practical grasp of the issues involved and the thorough training in philosophy which she brought to this work of reconstruction were rare indeed among her colleagues; and to these gifts she added a genuine passion for teaching and an administrative ability that forced her into the very center of the struggle between old and new conceptions of education. The tasks she set herself were the more arduous because she made no compromise with her ideal of perfection; was as indefatigable in doing the kind of teaching in which she believed as in establishing fundamental educational theories. When the vantage ground for which she had long striven was attained, and real and vital order realized, at least approximately, in English teaching at Vassar, she was ready for the next step and at once enlarged her departmental activities by initiating and organizing two co-operative educational ventures, the Vassar Workshop and the Community Theatre of Poughkeepsie. Her work, from beginning to end of her professional career,

PREFACE

was thus that of the pioneer; and, like that of the pioneer in every field, pressed all her faculties into its service.

The creative power that showed itself in her work as a teacher, was no less characteristic of her as a critic. Her intellectual gifts were in large part those of the poet. Perhaps most conspicuous among them was a vivid realization of individuality, whether in character, idea, or physical object. Her range of interests was singularly wide; her mind explored many fields, her response to forward-looking movements, whether social or literary, was immediate, her large circle of friends included people of all ages and condition. But although she ranged far, her thought was never weakened by diffusion, or paled into abstractness. Ideas took on with her the sharpness of individual existences; when most far-reaching they were seen in relation to the real life of real people. In even casual meetings, she was quick to recognize the unique qualities of personality. The generalization thus embodied to her the richness of concrete experience; the concrete experience was illumined with the ideas it visualized or illustrated. With this vividness of perception she combined an exceptional power to trace out the relationship between objects and to recognize the laws operating in them. Conclusions never remained in her mind as mere conclusions, but became at once vital and active realities, living forces working for the discovery of ever-new truths. Her indefatigable challenge of every element in idea or term or fact might seem to the formally-minded meaningless repetition; but her thought was fruitful precisely because of the Socratic temper with which in dealing with any subject she suffered nothing to remain that was not essential and operative, because observation and generalization were alike but means for the attainment of a fuller and richer concept.

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The simplicity she inexorably demanded was the necessary consequence of all her intellectual processes. It was based on concrete experience made significant by the fullest understanding. The isolated, the irrelevant, the confused—welcomed as first steps in the intellectual life—were tolerated for but a moment; in the end lucidity, significance, simplicity, were exacted of every thought or perception or emotion. Search for this fine clarity revealed itself in her every characteristic and in all aspects of her life. Her tastes, refined to asceticism, were yet instruments of exquisite discernment; her friendships were companionships in strenuous and discriminating pursuit of some excellence. The truth she prized shone in the “white light” of clearest vision; experience she valued only as the whole energy was focused in the activity of the moment. Thought found its place in the intellectual life in so far as by simplifying and organizing knowledge, it made possible still further advance; criticism was justified among the intellectual activities as it led to an idea informed with something of a Platonic vitality as well as a Platonic richness of content.

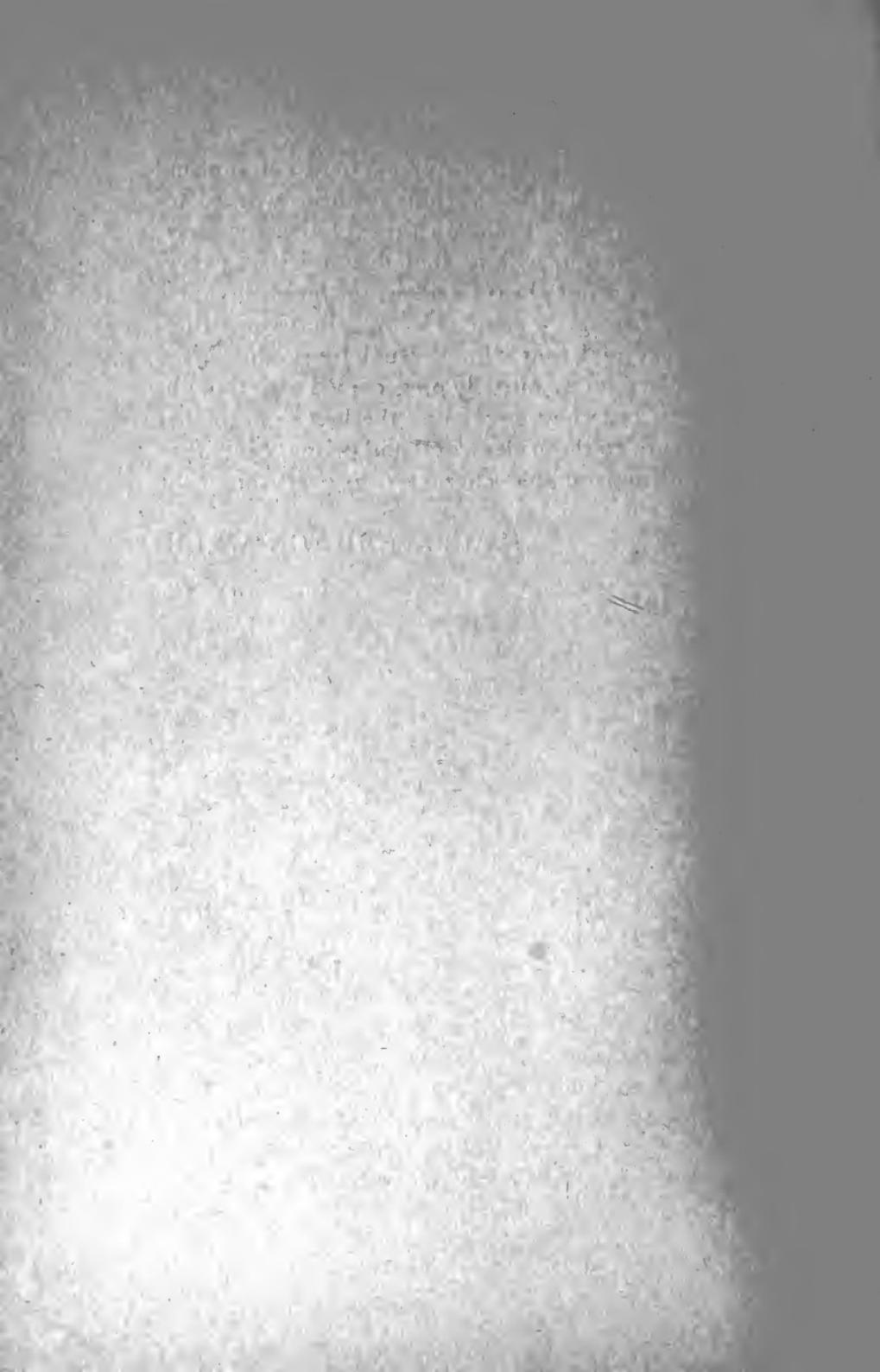
The fact that Miss Buck was peculiarly at home in the world of imaginative creation or that the core of her activity in all fields was an imaginative power that habitually led her beyond the analysis of her experiences to their reconstruction and expression, has of course nothing to do with the value of these writings themselves. Yet the editor stresses these points in view of their relation to the more obvious aspects of her life and work. There was nothing on which as thinker and teacher she insisted more energetically than on the general educational value of imaginative discipline. But the characteristic intellectual bias that both conditioned this conviction and was reinforced by it was in great part

PREFACE

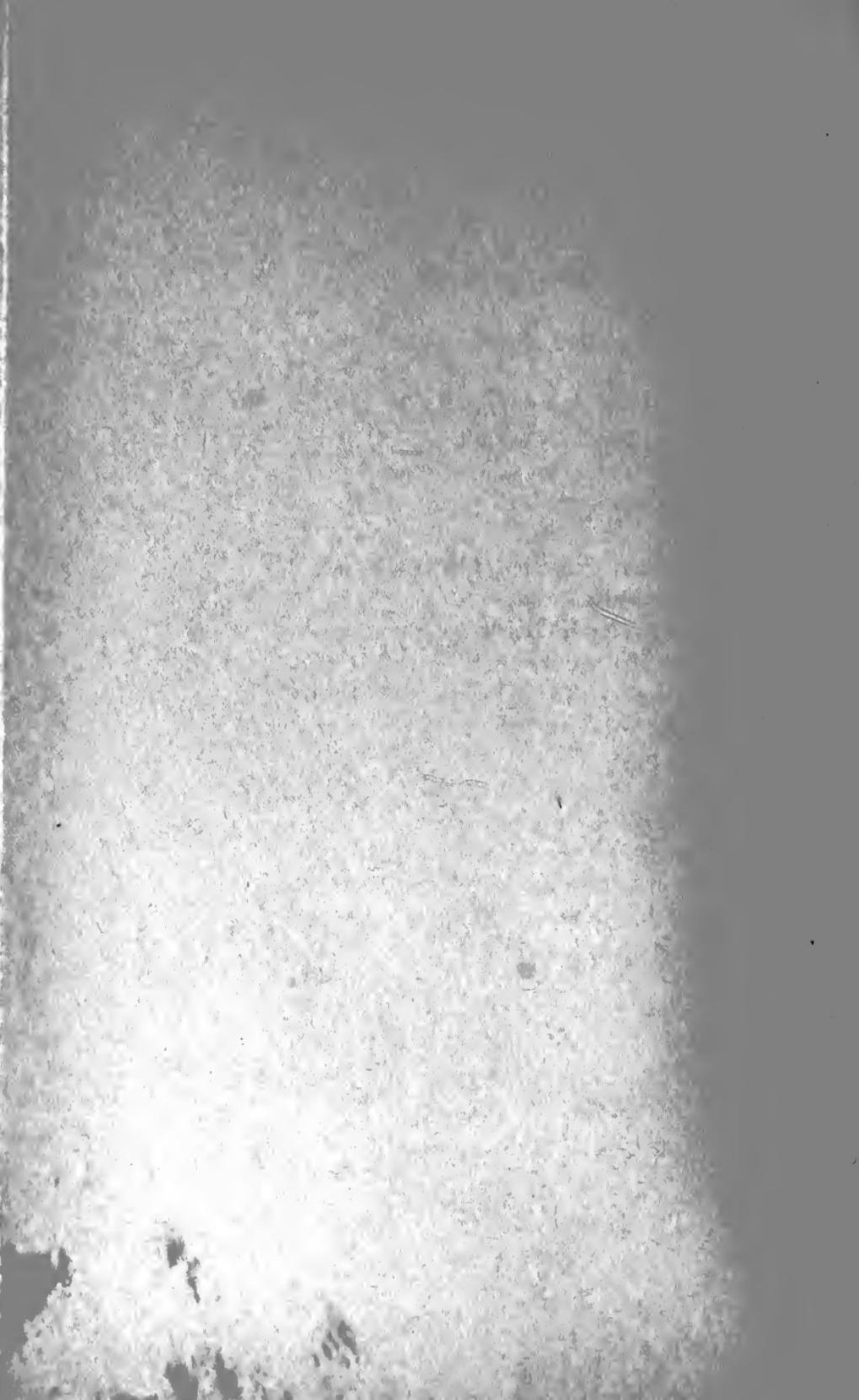
concealed by the fact that her mind acted to an unusual degree as a whole, that her various faculties worked together if they worked at all. In this volume, therefore, we have a key to much that, though implicit in everything she did, was not always evident to those who knew her chiefly as teacher or critic. Her imaginative writings were, in a very real sense, intellectual by-products, the avocations of a mind habitually preoccupied with thought and practice; but they were none the less signs of her constant return to those elemental and primary impulses which gave unmistakable character to everything she did and thought.

LAURA JOHNSON WYLIE

November, 1922.



POEMS



POEMS

A LODGE IN THE WOODS

The high-hole tapped upon my door;
I rose to let him in.

He stayed without, but on the floor
Some leaves with scurrying din
Swept past me, standing in my door
To let the high-hole in.

Through loosened thatches slips the rain,
My fireside warmth to share,
His fingers drum upon the pane,
His blue robe fills the air
With darkening swirl. Come in, Friend Rain,
My fireside warmth to share.

The sun sifts in at every chink,
The winds whisk in and out.
There's no room in my house to think
And none to fear and doubt,
For sun pours in at every chink,
And winds whisk in and out.

THE MARKET PLACE

As when, a child, in covetous small hand
I clasped the precious penny, lord of joy,
Perplexed how best its powers to employ,
Since worlds of pleasure lay in my command;
Each new lure all but helpless to withstand,
Distraught 'twixt sweet and sweet, 'twixt toy and toy,
Till need to choose became delight's alloy,
And I bewildered stood in fairy land:

So now, in marts where subtler goods are sold,
My one unmeasured life in hand I hold,
The child's delicious doubts and pangs recall;
How may I best expend my coin small?
I stand and palter while the day grows old—
What shall I buy with life? It is my all.

POEMS

THE COMPLAINT OF YOUTH

But one short life! Thou niggard God, for shame!
Canst give no more? A thousand doors stand wide.
Wilt close them all save one thou bidst me name?
I will not choose. I claim those lives denied!

DOUBT'S GUIDANCE

I went to walk with Doubt.
In speech unfeigned the pregnant hours lapsed on,
Till night came down and blotted landmarks out,
And stars but faintly shone.
Still on we walked and talked, till dawn's pale ray
Showed unfamiliar all the scene about.
A subtle pain
Smote my sad heart and stung my weary brain,
Yet all the world, new-born, before me lay,
And, o'er the hills, upclimbed the purpling day.
I turned to thank my guide—but Doubt was gone!

POEMS

A MOMENT OF FAITH

Myself at the core of the world,
Myself at the center of time,
The planets about me are whirled,
Myself than the stars more sublime.

Myself in the youth that is mine,
Myself in the faith without stain;
Naught is that I dare not resign,
And naught that I shall not regain.

POEMS

A REFLECTION

Though loneliness be with us as our breath
While breath is ours, e'en that's at length outrun:
Our severed paths converge in thronging death,
And in the world's great life the dead are one.

POEMS

PEACE

Outstretched on the soft summer sod
 All tranquil I lie,
About me the limitless air,
 Above, the wide sky.
Within, not the shadow of care,
 Contented am I.

Outstretched on the bosom of God,
 I do not inquire
What gladness or grief may befall.
 His love cannot tire.
God is and I am, that is all—
 What more to desire?

POEMS

MIRACLE

I lay upon my bed last night and thought,
As one faint star began its course to run.
I slept and woke. A wonder had been wrought—
Night's starry thought blazed forth a morning sun.

POEMS

COMPENSATION

Give me a voice, oh my masters, dread monarchs
of pain—

Words to loose the thoughts that are languishing, dumb
and in prison.

Speech is mine, by the right of the sorrow through which
I have risen.

Have I suffered, my masters, in vain?

POEMS

A SONG OF TOMORROW

Why dost turn thy face away,
Fair tomorrow?
Let me from thine aspect gay
Joyance borrow
For a chill and drear today.

Nay, let not thine eyes betray
Some new sorrow;
Let me bear no more today:
Dread tomorrow,
Turn oh turn thy face away.

POEMS

"WHEN HALF-GODS GO, THE GODS ARRIVE"

Great Love, unseen, unknown,
I turn to Thee;
Because I am, Thou art,
And art for me.
I banish love's sweet part
For Love's best whole;
I stand discrowned, alone,
Bereft in soul.
Great Love, I cannot see,
Come Thou and comfort me!

POEMS

NIGHT THOUGHT

My days slip by in sordid mummeries,
Yet every night I turn my eyes to sleep
A-smile, for thought of golden argosies
That sail to me on some uncharted deep.

POEMS

THE FRIEND

“Hail, friend!” I cry, with foolish heart elate
As stranger footsteps near my wide-flung gate.
I scan each entering visage; touched with grace
Full many, but not one the longed-for face.
They come and go. I sit here still and wait.

THE PAST

The inn where I abode is sure enchanted.
I strode thereout at break of day and left
My goods behind. No backward look I granted;
Yet strains of following music me bereft
Of thought and sense. I knelt upon the sod
And stopped my thirsting ears and prayed to God.
So came I thence; but though I hold my will,
That music through my heart is ringing still.

POEMS

THE QUESTION

When I die, shall I know—
Being wing of the fly,
Blue crust of the snow,
Chill wind sweeping by,
Child's voice cooing low,—
Shall I know I am I?

GETHSEMANE

To look deep into Immolation's eyes
And read denial there;
Renounce renunciation, sacrifice
The sacrificial impulse, dear as fair;—
This cup to drink passed not away from me,
I drained it dry in dark Gethsemane.

POEMS

CIRCLES

If but the sun could reach me where I lie
Shadowed by bracken, I should grow so high
He need not seek me: but without him I
Shall ne'er attain him; he must pass me by.

WHAT THE LIGHTNING SHOWED

Brown roadways, rainy scented; night-black pools
Which, lightning-smitten, flushed to golden dawn;
Drenched tree-trunks velvet black, and troubled schools
Of pale-faced leaves down pelted on the lawn.

POEMS

AUTUMN RAIN

The rain poured, sodden, gray,
Through yellowing maple trees
That lit, with subtle ray,
The dull descending seas.

POEMS

PILGRIM SONG I

Heaven! the children are singing;
Heaven! the preachers repeat;
But the only heaven that is, boys,
Is the on-pushing print of our feet:
And our thirst for the waters that nowhere flow
Though their lying babble be sweet.

POEMS

AFTER SUNSET

A softly-quenched and purple brooding sky
Over a dead gray sea;—and you and I
Saw wondering, as Galahad the Grail,
Glow roseate, ecstatic, one far sail.

EPHEMERON

Though love may endure but a day
And sorrow a night,
Though the moment takes flight
And June crowds on May;

Yet we love for a day
And we weep through the night;
Crown the hours in their flight
And dance out the swift May.

For love is still love for a day,
And grief stings the soul for a night;
The moment is ours till its flight,
And May while it lasts is yet May.

POEMS

INTERLUDE

I have eaten and drunk the loves of men,
I have hungered and I have been satisfied.
The table is cleared—to be spread again?
Who knows? It is long till the eventide.

POEMS

THE CLEAR VISION

I caught the formless thing I feared to see
And searched its shifty eyes. No secret sore
In all its loathsome life eluded me.
I saw, and weep. What profit have I more?

POEMS

FOUNDATIONS

Under thy sumptuous blooming,
Garden of Love, has the rain
Washed from their scanty entombing
Sodden gray bones of the slain.

POEMS

TRAGEDY

She could not nerve me whom she loved the best,
Because she doubted (me she did not know!)
Whether my strength sufficed to deal the blow.
I faltered, paused—and failure tells the rest.

POEMS

LOVE'S CUP

Stint but a paltry drop, the wine turns gall;
Defer too long, thirst slips beyond recall;
Then brim me now, or pour thou not at all!

POEMS

POETRY

I.

Life of man, still fling me forward in your surge,
Follow swiftly, lest I fail and die;
Drink me up, and, rainbow-haunted, onward urge—
Flashing lift of answering deep am I.

II.

The heart of one cried out and the cry was song;
One heard, and his own heart's cry was answered.
Brothers unseen, the heart of each rested in the heart of
the other.

POEMS

THE SEEING EYE

The sun-bleached gray of trees in early spring
Flushed at the tips with bloom, delight shall bring
In fullest measure to those raptured eyes
That traced black boughs chill etched on winter skies.

SURPRISE

In that lone hour when, from a tear-blurred dream,
One starts to know the old besieging pain
Has leaped his walls, alarum tolls in vain;
The soul supine, far off the armor's gleam.

POEMS

BEREAVEMENT

Through sob-racked nights and empty chattering days
She feeds the perfumed censer of his praise:
Bereft not yet until its flame burn low.—
Let her not lose her loss—she must not know.

POEMS

THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

The road to Nowhere is white and still;
It slopes up softly, then dips from sight;
Blue over its shoulder peers the hill,
And brambles guard it to left and right.

POEMS

A MAINE ROAD

A glint of birches in the dusky pines,
A sudden scent of balsam and sweet fern,
Long starry plumes of wild blackberry vines,
A flash of ocean at the roadway's turn.

IN A TENT

Tremulous shadows in shifting design
Here on the sun-flooded canvas are met:
Twinkling birch leaves and soft whorls of the pine,
Wild cherry shoots and a tossing grape vine.
Wings flash across, for an instant is set
High on some twig a wee bird's silhouette.

POEMS

THE MIDDLE YEARS

Yon closed red tulips, sleek and passionate,
In silvery leafage their occasion wait.
The wide-flung ardor of their opening
Let him abide who craves its flame and sting:
The wearied heart sates its extreme desires
With folded petals and with smouldering fires.

POEMS

INVOCATION

Blown mist of rosy grasses,
Into my singing drift.
Kindle its cloven masses
With lights that sway and shift,
Within its dark impasses
Your fairy torches lift.

Brown rill through rushes wending,
Where red-wings flash and dip,
Lend me the rhythm bending
Each dark reed's yellowing tip—
The pause, the swift ascending,
The careless slide and slip.

Into my plodding measure
Your least enchantment fling,
Earth of the winds' wild pleasure
And leaves' soft jargoning—
Yield me but one hid treasure—
Then listen, while I sing!

POEMS

PILGRIM SONG II

The joy that lies curled
In young fern-leaves close-furled
Come seek through the world!
Adown the dim hollow
Where slides a still stream
The jewel-weed's gleam
O follow, O follow!

Each quaint carven crown,
Rose-flushed ivory down
To its circlet of brown
On stem of white clover,
Lures earth-loving eyes
From faces or skies,—
Come, roam the field over!

Ask naught but to trace
On heaven's clear space
That line of wild grace
The flight of the swallow;
The light on the hill,
The thrush's low trill
To follow, to follow.

POEMS

AN EPITAPH

A. B. B.

Of sun and fields and every joy of sight
A simple lover—Christ her spirit keep!—
She toiled and prayed beneath a fading light;
The room was darkened and she fell asleep.

THE RETURN

By night my mother heard me sobbing, calling on her name,
And from the blessed heights of death to comfort me she came.

I flung myself once more upon my mother's gentle breast
And sobbed out all the thorny griefs against my heart long pressed,—

The hours I might have spent with her, the words I never said,
The love I drank so carelessly till she who loved was dead.

What I would say she knew, although my words were choked and wild:
We sat close-locked; my years slipped off; naught was I but her child.

Into my breast a healing came; black grief did from me part.

I woke to peace; though death was king, my mother knew my heart.

By night my mother heard me sobbing, calling on her name,
And from the blessed heights of death to comfort me she came.

POEMS

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

Fling wide the gates of heaven, God;
We will not enter in
Save with our brother whom Thy nod
Hath sealed to want and sin.

Fling wide the gates. Thy golden street
The Dispossessed shall stain
With road-worn, broken, bleeding feet,
The feet of toil and pain.

Fling wide the gates. Thy glassy sea
With anthems shall not ring;
For these born thralls of misery,
They know not how to sing.

Thy many mansions swift unbar
To men, who, huddled here,
In dens unglimped of sun or star,
Lie rotting, tier on tier.

Upon Thy fields elysian set
The sad old babes to play:
Beside Thy living waters let
The painted women stray.

Else we, the fortunate, the strong,
Whose heaven is where we be,
Will follow with the outcast throng
And leave Thy heaven to Thee.—

POEMS

Yon God is naught. He cannot hear,
Nor open heaven, nor bar;
The living God to need is near,
From privilege how far!

By hands raised not to Him in prayer
He builds our paradise;
By our defeats, distrust, despair,
Its walls unreckoned rise.

Our eager, fumbling wills conspire
Stone upon stone to rear
The house of all the world's desire,
Assured past faith or fear.

Wherever vampire mine or mill
Can drown not, clamoring high,
With clang of steel and whistles shrill,
The children's bitter cry;

Where lords of labor dare no more
In sweat-shop's reeking pen
To gods of gain insatiate pour
The royal blood of men;

Where beauty blooms on public ways,
By kindly human plan,
There lifts the edifice we raise
Of man's goodwill to man.

By many wrought, by none designed,
On earth's firm sod it stands;
The gift of men to all mankind,
A heaven made with hands.

POEMS

*CHILDREN OF GOD

Children of God and heirs of His dominion,
 No fear, no ill against us shall prevail.
Love bears us up on mighty, tireless pinion,
 Love that can never falter, never fail.

Our strength renewed from God's eternal fountains,
 Singing we fare on His appointed ways;
Glad are our feet upon His holy mountains,
 Our hearts enkindled at the torch of praise.

Awe-stilled we watch life's harmony unfolding,
 Each shifting scene in God's design arranged;
His glory we, with open face beholding,
 To that same image day by day are changed.

O healing Truth, Thine uttermost salvation
 No power can bar from him who sees Thy face;
Each day shall dawn a fuller revelation,
 Each night add knowledge of God's wondrous grace.

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POEMS

UNIVERSITY HYMN

[Tune: Ancient of Days, by T. A. Jeffery]
Deep lie thy roots, the state's unseen foundation,
Thou Alma Mater, tree of life and light.
Wrought in thy fiber, every generation
Grows with thy growth and strengthens with thy might.

Greatly they dreamed who planted thee, yet passing
Man's hope and vision, still thou dost increase.
All nations meet beneath thy verdure's massing;
Thy leaves are for their healing and their peace.

Girdling the earth, thy silent word fulfilling,
'Neath Ceylon's palms or Oxford's "dreaming spires,"
In deeds unreckoned, in unconscious willing,
Thy children keep alight thine altar fires.

No morn shall see thy lofty head diminished,
No sun behold thee less than thou hast been;
Not till time ends thy living growth be finished,
Nor thy rich fruitage all be gathered in.

POEMS

AT THE WIND'S WILL

As if some wild blackberry vine should lay
One starry spray
Athwart a broad-leaved fern,
And stay
A moment there, to turn
Its sober verdure gay,

So lightly, love, thy life doth hold with mine;
I must resign
Its tender leaning when
The vine,
In some soft breeze again
Tears loose each clinging spine.

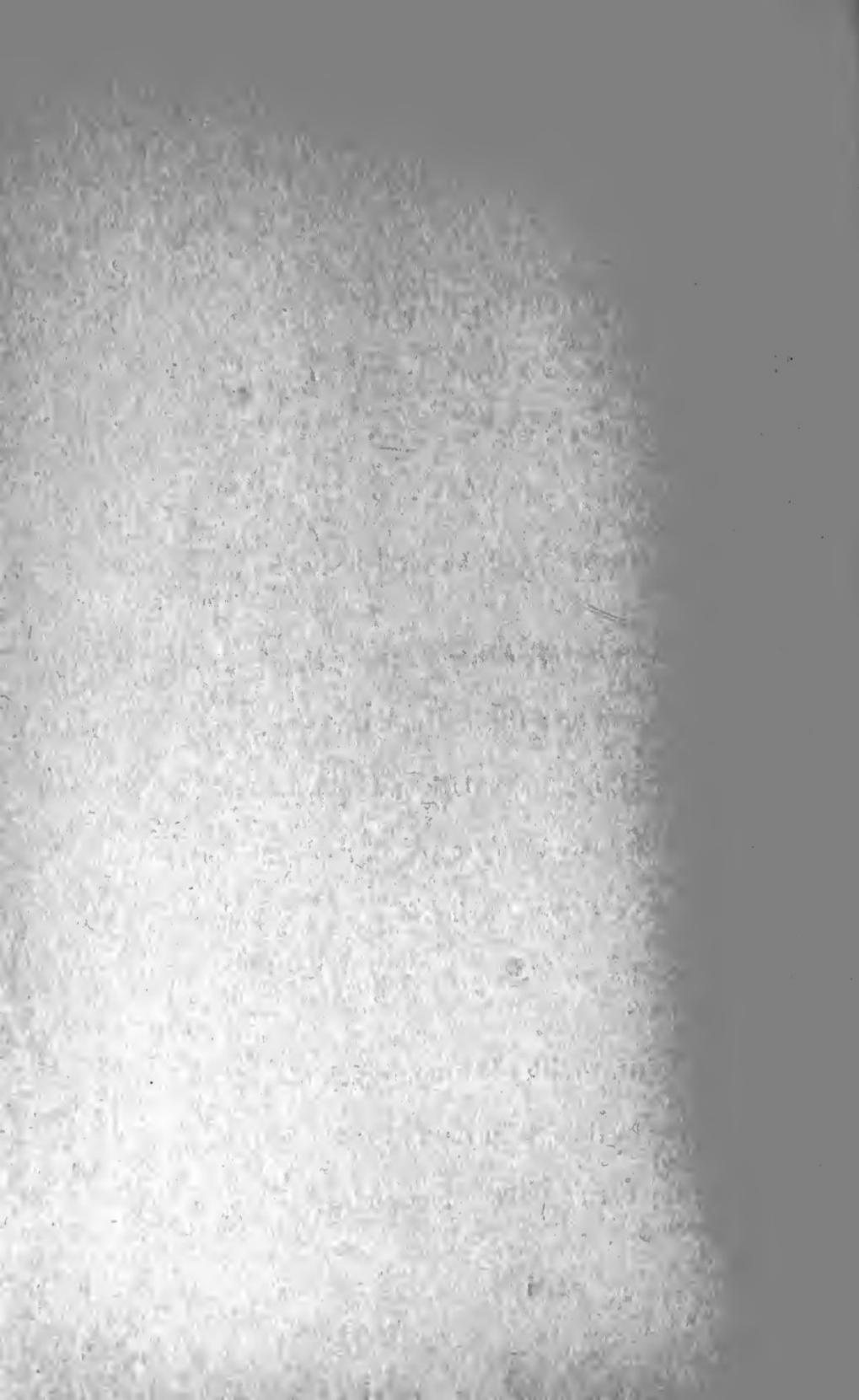
Yet, swaying, clasp we still as those who may
Entwined decay.
God grant this boon may be!
And stay
The careless wind, that we
May finish so our day.

THE WITCH HAZEL

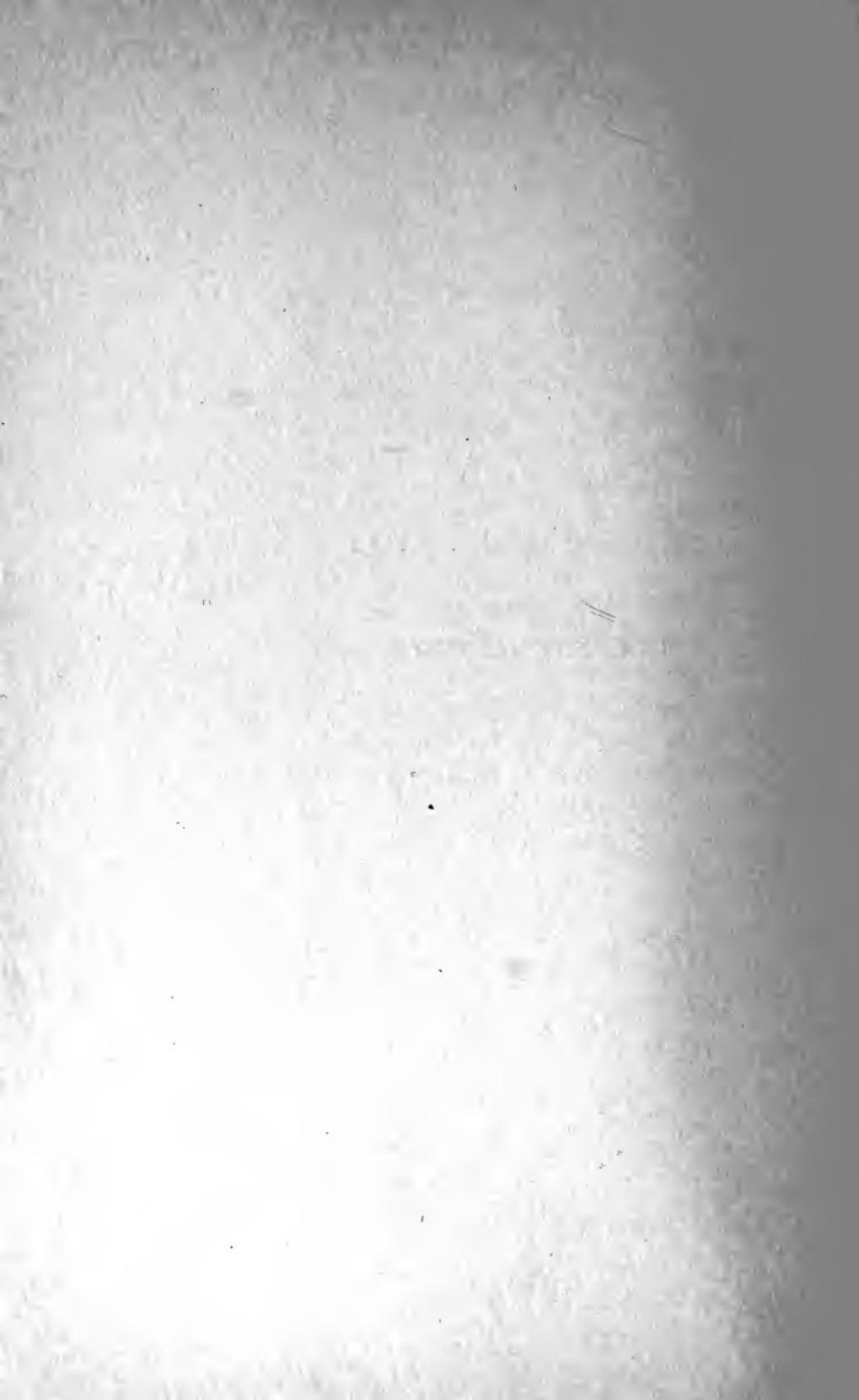
By blazoned autumn roads Witch Hazel stands.
The ripe-hued lands
Her coming wait, whose pale, uncertain ray
Shall long outstay
The aspen's twinkling gold, the flaming lines
Of high-flung vines
That wreath dull cedars, and the tarnished glow
Of corn a-row.

In star-mist veiled, leaf-bare, her wands of light
Turn back the flight
Of summer days, and hold them, drunk with sun,
While past them run
November's shriveled hours of dark and cold.
The season old
Grows young with thee, thou tree of all men's dreams.
Thy subtle gleams,
Enkindled at the year's low-sinking fires,
Wake dim desires
For youth in age, for joy in hope's decay.
For love's lost day.

Thou autumn spirit, wraith of autumn's gold,
Enchantress old
That buddest out of time, thou Aaron's rod,
The hand of God
Hath touched thy barren stalk to blossoming,
And lo, thy spring!



OCCASIONAL VERSE



FISHING

The wash of waters against the prow,
The guttural grunt of the frog's bassoon,
The far light laughter of the loon—,
A hush of hopeful waiting—now
A twitch on the line as if to say
“Are the folks at home?” then the rascal turns
And runs till the reel 'gainst your fingers burns.
You jerk in answer “Yes, home today,”
Pull in the mischief with steady hand,
Hold hard, no slack,—see his armor flash
All silver green through the foaming splash!
An instant more and he's brought to land—
The devil! he's spewed the hook clean out
And dived 'neath the boat with a leer and a flout!

OCCASIONAL VERSE

BERLIN
HIS EPITAPH WRITTEN BY HIMSELF

In life I was a sporty dog: I never took a dare.
I always leaped before I looked, and landed—God knows where.

Into a bath-tub, down a drain, upon a blazing fire,—
'Twas one to me, who hurled myself straight at my heart's desire.

I climbed back fences after cats, and scaled our own Dutch door,
To greet my mistress home returned from journeys long and sore.

But motor-cars my passion were. When one would gently glide
Along the curb, I'd make a dash and boldly leap inside.

If mistress had but followed me, and not been such a muff,
We two had had some glorious spins; but women lack the stuff.

Whene'er a car came sweeping on directly in my track
I sat me down and scratched my ear, until it changed its tack.

OCCASIONAL VERSE

My mistress chid me sternly, but you know what women
are—

I wonder what my life had been under another star.

If I had had a master, and he a sporting gent,
Black Johnson, say, or Jefferies—but I do not lament.

My days knew scant excitement, save that I did create,
But my dear mistress would for ills e'en greater com-
pensate.

And in that heaven where she holds we shall together be,
Perhaps she'll lose her sole defect, and be a man like me.

MOTHER-LOVE

Characters

MAGGIE ROSS, a dressmaker
MRS. ROSS, her mother
JIM ROSS, her brother
LURA ROSS, her sister

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[It is an evening in mid-December. Maggie's sewing-room is a low-ceiled, shabbily furnished room, with an outside door in the back. Another door at the right opens into the kitchen. A third door at the left leads upstairs. There is a window in the back wall. A small door-bell, connected by a visible wire with the outside door, hangs from the ceiling in the corner of the room. An old-fashioned hair-cloth-covered sofa stands against the wall, with a small table at its head. A high chest of drawers is at the back of the room and a large round table with a lamp on it is in the center. A small, brightly-glowing coal-stove is at the right front, a folding screen covered with gay cretonne back of it, opened against the right wall. A figure for fitting dresses, standing at one side, has on it an ugly, unfinished dress of wide-striped black and red silk. The bright-colored, well-worn ingrain carpet is strewn with snippets of cloth and bits of basting cotton. Paper patterns and fashion-plates from magazines are pinned to the coarse lace window curtains and the flower-papered walls. Maggie is standing over the sofa on which Mother is lying, propped up high on a pile of cretonne-covered pillows, with a knitted afghan spread over her. Maggie is a middle-aged woman with a delicate-featured face which, though worn and sometimes anxious in expression, seems to be lighted from within by an absorbing happiness. She wears a shabby serge dress and a white apron, with a red pin-cushion full of pins hanging from her belt. Mother is attired in a tumbled

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lavender kimono trimmed lavishly with cheap machine-made lace. Her white hair falls untidily about her sleek, self-indulgent, self-satisfied face.

MAGGIE [*cheerfully*]: It's a little better, isn't it, Mother? Just a little?

MOTHER [*in a feeble but irritable voice*]: Maggie, how often have I told you not to ask me questions when I have a headache? You always make it worse.

MAGGIE [*arrested by contrition in the act of dropping the cloth into the basin*]: Oh, I *hope* I haven't this time, Mumsie dear! I thought it must be nearly well.

MOTHER [*petulantly*]: No, it isn't. And it won't be, if you act like this. [*She sighs deeply and closes her eyes. Maggie dips the cloth in the water, wrings it out, and lays it on Mother's head. Mother snatches it off.—In a voice of intense exasperation*]: Don't put that thing on me again!

MAGGIE [*surprised*]: Oh, I thought—

MOTHER [*plaintively, recovering her feeble tone*]: It doesn't do me a speck of good. Nothing does. [*With a yawn, followed by a heavy sigh.*] I might as well go to bed, I s'pose. But of course I can't sleep.

MAGGIE [*takes the cloth from Mother, drops it into the basin, and wipes her hands on the towel lying beside it*]: Yes, do go, Mumsie. Lura has got your bed open for you and she's going to bathe your head with cologne, till you drop off.

MOTHER [*pettishly, with half closed eyes*]: I'd rather have you.

MAGGIE [*imploringly*]: Oh Mumsie, *do* let her do it. She loves to take care of people. And I could just about finish her doll, while she's upstairs. [*She takes half-dressed doll out of the chest of drawers and displays it admiringly.*] Isn't her little hat sweet? Lura will be tickled to pieces when she sees that blue-jay feather on it.

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MOTHER [*opening her eyes wide, and sitting up*]: Maggie Ross, are you going to give her that doll—after all I've said?

MAGGIE [*takes her work-basket, and sits down to sew on the doll's dress*]: Why, Mother dear, that's what she wants. I can't give her grown-up things, you know. She'd be so disappointed.

MOTHER [*fiercely*]: Well, if *you* like to see a gray-headed woman messing 'round with dolls and picture-books, other people don't! It makes *me* so sick I can hardly *live*. You might think once in a while of *my* feelings.

MAGGIE [*laying aside the doll, jumps up from her chair and sits beside Mother on the sofa*]: Oh, Mother dear, I do. But Lura isn't a gray-headed woman to me, you know. I guess I see her the way she sees herself—just a little girl eight years old. [Tenderly.] And we must make her happy, mustn't we? It's all we *can* do for her.

MOTHER [*acidly*]: Oh, of course, if *she's* only happy. Nobody cares about me. It's all Lura with you. [With rising anger.] I guess I know what is best for my own child, Maggie Ross, but you never listen to me. Anybody'd think she was your child, instead of mine.

MAGGIE: Why, no, Mother. But it's for her Christmas.

MOTHER: Christmas! Don't talk about Christmas to me. What kind of a Christmas will it be for me, I'd like to know, with my boy at the ends of the earth, or maybe lying in his grave?

MAGGIE [*trying to put her arms around Mother*]: Oh, Mumsie, dear, I know. But couldn't you—just for Lura and me—

MOTHER [*putting her away*]: No, I couldn't. And I

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don't want any presents from either of you. Just remember that.

MAGGIE: Oh, Mother, not anything at all?

MOTHER: No. You can give me the money you were going to spend for me, if you want to. But I won't have anything else.

MAGGIE: But, Mother, we're only *making* some little things for you. They don't cost anything much. But they give us the Christmas feeling.

MOTHER: Well, if they don't cost but a nickel, I'd rather have that than anything you'd buy with it and fuss up. There's no Christmas feeling for me till my boy comes home, and I ain't going to pretend there is.

[*Lura's voice is heard from above.*]

LURA: Maggie.

MAGGIE [*going to stair door and opening it*]: Yes, dear.

LURA [*accusingly*]: I'm waiting an' *waiting*.

MAGGIE: Mother's coming—just a minute.

MOTHER [*fretfully*]: Where's my handkerchief, Maggie?

MAGGIE: It must be on the sofa. [*She looks for it behind Mother, finds and shakes it out. It is seen to be full of holes.*]

MAGGIE [*giving it to her*]: Oh, Mother, dear, haven't you any better handkerchiefs than this?

MOTHER [*with conscious heroism*]: It doesn't matter.

MAGGIE: Didn't you buy some new ones with the money I gave you? [*Mother purses her lips and looks complacently mysterious, but does not answer.*] I guess she embezzled it again, the bad Mumsie, and put it in her secret drawer. Well, I might have known she would. [*She sighs involuntarily.*]

MOTHER [*rising indignantly and looking down on*

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Maggie with an outraged expression]: Embezzle, Miss Maggie? That is a strange word for a daughter to use about her mother.

MAGGIE [*rising and attempting to take Mother's hands, which Mother impatiently withdraws*]: Oh, Mumsie, dear, I'm only joking, of course. But I can't bear to have you go without things so.

MOTHER [*with sad dignity*]: It is for my boy, Maggie. I want nothing for myself.

MAGGIE [*with a sigh*]: Take some of my handkerchiefs, dear, till I can buy a few new ones. We're nearly out of coal, and Lura's shoes—

MOTHER: I am used to doing without things. It is a mother's lot to sacrifice for her children.

LURA [*from above*]: Maggie, hurry up!

MAGGIE: Yes, dearie, coming right away. Want your novel, Mother? [*She picks up a volume from the sofa.*]

MOTHER [*languidly*]: I've finished that. Lura must go to the library for me, tomorrow.

MAGGIE: All right. Good-night, Mumsie. Pleasant dreams!

MOTHER [*ascending the stairs*]: I don't expect to sleep at all. Good-night.

[*Maggie folds the afghan and lays it smoothly over the foot of the sofa, sets the pillows in order, and takes the basin from the table into the kitchen. The door-bell rings softly and she re-enters hastily, smoothing her apron with her hands as she goes to the outside door and opens it wide.*]

MAGGIE: Good evening.

JIM [*outside*]: Good evening. Is this Miss Ross?

MAGGIE: Yes. Is there something—?

JIM: Can I see you a few minutes? A little matter of business.

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MAGGIE: Why certainly. Won't you come in?

[*Jim enters with a jaunty yet somewhat uncertain air. Removing his hat, he shows a bald head with a fringe of gray hair about it, a gray Van Dyke beard and pointed moustache, perched incongruously on a fat red face. Heavy glasses almost conceal his eyes, but he looks easy-going, impressionable, sympathetic. His overcoat is worn but of a stylish cut. At first glance one might place him in a higher social class than Maggie's. Maggie offers him a chair by the table.*] Please sit down.

[*Jim pulls off his overcoat and lays it with his hat on the chair Maggie indicates, turns another with its back to the lamp and sits down. Maggie sits near him, facing the light. Jim devours with his eyes her face and every detail of the room, but she seems wholly unconscious of his scrutiny, absorbed in the business in hand.*]

JIM: I'm looking for a room, and a lady up the street told me maybe I could rent one here.

MAGGIE [*surprised*]: Oh, no, I'm afraid not. We haven't any room. That is.. [She stops abruptly, as if struck by a new idea, and clasps and unclasps her hands, looking from Jim to the stairway door with alternate eager desire and despondency. With an almost imperceptible shake of the head, she drops her hands quietly into her lap.]

JIM [*regretfully*]: I wish you had. I'd like to stay here first-rate.

MAGGIE [*glancing again toward the stairs*]: There is a room that we don't use now for anyone, but Mother wouldn't hear of it, I'm sure.

JIM [*in a hushed, sympathetic tone*]: Belonged to some one who's dead?

MAGGIE: It's my brother's room. He's been away twenty-eight years now, and it's sixteen years this Christmas since we heard from him.

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JIM: Well, that don't look as if he'd be wanting to use his room right away, does it?

MAGGIE: No. And I wish we *could* let you have it. [Again clasping and unclasping her hands and leaning forward eagerly.] I wonder—do you believe in prayer?

JIM [*kindly, but with an embarrassed chuckle*]: Well, I don't know as I do, much. There might be something in it.

MAGGIE: I do wish I *knew*. I've been asking God to show me some way to earn a little money, and it seems as if He *must* have sent you.

JIM [*with another chuckle, half-tender, half-amused*]: Well, 'sposin' He did?

MAGGIE [*with conviction*]: He *must* have done it. I never even *thought* of that room. But I don't know what Mother will say?

JIM: Will she mind awfully?

MAGGIE [*in an awed tone*]: You don't know what it means to her. [With intensity.] But we've *got* to have a new roof. The old one can't be mended any more. And it costs almost a hundred dollars! [She looks at Jim for sympathy.]

JIM [*feelingly*]: That's a terrible price!

MAGGIE [*with a stifled sigh, looking toward the figure*]: And I can't do very much dressmaking, what with the housework and all, though Lura's a wonderful help, for a child, so—

JIM [*startled*]: A child?

MAGGIE [*with a low, tender laugh*]: She isn't really a child, she's my older sister, but she had an awful sickness when she was eight years old and her brain never grew after that, so she's always stayed just the way she was then.

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JIM [*thoughtfully*]: I see. Well, I should think you'd have to rent a room, if you've got one *to rent*.

MAGGIE [*desperately*]: Yes, I *must*. But I don't believe Mother *will*. If you take it, you won't mind, will you, if she tells you to go?

JIM [*chuckling*]: No, I won't mind. Shall I stay right on till she begins throwing the flatirons?

MAGGIE [*reproachfully*]: Oh you *mustn't* laugh. That room—well, it's really sacred to her, because it was Jim's. She's never let *anybody* sleep in it—not even Lura or me. Lura sleeps with me and she'd like a room all her own. But Mother *couldn't* do it. Oh, I'm *sure* she won't let you stay in it!

JIM: But if you need money so much—

MAGGIE: Mother doesn't think much about money, only for Jim.

JIM: For Jim? Why, she doesn't know where he is.

MAGGIE: No, but she thinks Jim will ask her to come and live with him some day, and she wants to have money to go with. Or she thinks maybe he will fall sick and she must go where he is and have something to help him with. She thinks *everything* of Jim.

JIM [*with half-smothered irritation*]: Well, why should she? What's he ever done for her? Did he use to send her money before he quit writing?

MAGGIE [*reluctantly*]: Well, no. But he couldn't really. He didn't get on very well, I guess. And it's hard for a man to economize, don't you think so? They don't know how, the way a woman does, That's what Mother always says.

JIM [*with a snort of contempt*]: I know *his* sort, all right.

MAGGIE [*really hurt*]: You don't know Jim. You couldn't help liking him, if you did.

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JIM [*with an obstinate wag of the head*]: You bet I could! But I'll tell you what I'll do, if you want me to. I'm going west myself, in a month or so, and, if you'll tell me where your brother was when he wrote you the last letter, I'll look him up.

MAGGIE [*in a flutter of delight*]: Oh, would you, really? He was in Phoenix, Arizona. It seems too much for you to do, for strangers, so. But if you *could* find him, it would be more to Mother than anything else in the world.

JIM [*gruffly*]: 'Twouldn't be much to you, I s'pose, and I don't blame you.

MAGGIE: Oh, yes, it *would*. But he's all Mother has, you know. And I've got Lura. [*Her face lights at Lura's name.*]

JIM [*exasperated*]: Say, your Mother's got you, hasn't she, and Lura, too?

MAGGIE: Oh, but daughters *can't* be like a son, you know—an only son. She thinks about him all the time, I guess, but Christmas and her birthday are the worst of all. She always used to get a letter on those days, and when she doesn't, we can't do *anything* to make her happy. She just sits and grieves over Jim. It's awful to see her.

JIM: Must be pretty tough.

MAGGIE: Yes, sometimes we can't get her to speak to either of us for days and days. I feel so bad for Lura, you know. She ought to have a happy childhood, don't you think so? even if it *is* an extra long one. Seems, if that's all we *can* do for her, just make her happy.

JIM [*in a choked voice*]: Say, I guess *you're* Lura's mother, all right.

MAGGIE [*shocked at the idea*]: Oh, no. I couldn't be that. Mother says if you're not really a mother, you

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can't know how a mother feels; and I'm not, you know. I'm not married.

JIM [*indignantly*]: What's that got to do with it? I've seen women runnin' over with kids that was no more mothers than I am. An' some ole maids—why, Good Lord! They mothered everything in sight.

MAGGIE [*softly, her face kindling*]: I wish I *was* her mother.

JIM [*looking at her speculatively*]: I don't see why you *didn't* get married.

MAGGIE [*surprised*]: Why, I couldn't. What would Mother and Lura do?

JIM: Sure enough. What would they? Well, if I get hold of that brother of yours, I'll make him come home and look after his family if I have to kick him all the way from Arizona.

MAGGIE [*sternly*]: If you're going to talk like that to him, you needn't look him up at all. None of us feels that way about Jim.

JIM: Well, you have a good right to.

MAGGIE: Say, I wish you'd put yourself in Jim's place, once. Things were hard for him here. I see just how it was, now.

JIM: The deuce you do!

MAGGIE: I couldn't help seeing. It isn't natural for a boy to be loving his mother all the time, I 'spose; and Mother is a great one for petting and love-talk. Jim couldn't bear to disappoint her—he has the *kindest* heart—so he had to go off some place where he wouldn't feel like a brute.

JIM [*with great satisfaction*]: That's it. He had to. [*In sudden revulsion.*] But he was a dirty quitter, just the same. [Maggie does not notice his words. Steps are heard on the stair. Maggie's eyes turn toward the door;

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her face lights with gentle happiness. She rises hastily, puts the doll into a drawer, and turns for an instant toward Jim.]

MAGGIE: Here's my little girl.

[The stair-door is pushed softly open and Lura enters. Her figure is that of a small, slight, elderly woman. She wears steel-bowed spectacles, but her face is unlined, and her expression is wistfully appealing, like that of a child. Her iron-gray hair is held back by a child's circle-comb and tied with a red-ribbon top-knot. Her short, red and blue plaid, woolen dress is made in a child's fashion. Her movements are timid, yet without the self-consciousness of an adult. Maggie goes to meet Lura, who hesitates at sight of Jim, puts her arm around her and leads her forward.]

MAGGIE: Come in, dear. This is my sister Lura. This gentleman has come to see about renting a room, but I'm afraid we haven't got any for him. *[Jim rises and offers his hand. His expression is wholly kind and pitiful.]*

JIM: How do you do—Lura?

LURA *[shakes hands, looking solemnly into Jim's face, and turning to Maggie]:* Is it brother Jim?

MAGGIE: Oh, no dear. *[To Jim.]* She asks God every night to send brother Jim home to us, so whenever any man comes to the house on an errand she thinks it must be Jim. I don't wonder; it's been a long time. *[To Lura.]* But God hasn't sent him yet, dear.

LURA *[decisively]:* I think it's time He did, don't you, Maggie? *[She fondles Maggie's hand, swinging her arm by it and looking shyly at Jim.]*

JIM *[steps forward with an air of sudden decision and takes Lura's other hand]:* Lura, you tell sister Maggie you guessed it, first time. It is brother Jim!

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LURA [*jumps up and down, chanting ecstatically*]: He's come home for Christmas! 'n brought me some presents!

MAGGIE [*incredulously, putting out a hand to still Lura*]: Jim? No, 'tisn't.

JIM [*gently*]: Yes, it is. I thought you wouldn't know me. I've got so fat and bald. And these glasses. [*He takes them off. Maggie moves toward him as if in a dream, and suddenly flings herself into his arms.*]

MAGGIE [*in a sobbing voice*]: Oh, Jim, why didn't you tell me? Here I went on talking like a great zany, telling you all the things you knew—

JIM: You told me lots I didn't know, too.

LURA [*charging upon his pockets*]: What'd you bring me? A doll an'—

MAGGIE [*pulling Lura's hands away*]: Lura, dear. You mustn't. That's rude. Let me talk to brother Jim a minute. [*She keeps an arm around Lura as she turns again to Jim.*] Did you come clear from Arizona, Jim? I can't believe it.

JIM [*laughing in some embarrassment*]: Oh, I ain't been in Arizona for fifteen years. I just happened to be down to the races at Galesburg an' so I thought mebbe I'd run over an'—an' take a look at things here.

MAGGIE [*looking earnestly into his face*]: Oh, Jim, didn't you mean to come home?

JIM [*uneasily*]: Oh, well, I didn't know what I was goin' to do. Thought I'd prospect 'round a little an' see. An' it came to me I'd get the laugh on you, askin' for a room an' makin' you talk some about me, if I could. That went slick, didn't it? You're an easy mark, Magsie.

MAGGIE: I don't care.

JIM: Well, I guess the laugh's on me, all right.

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You've put me wise what a low-lived scoundrel I've been, leavin' you to hold up the house all these years. But I'm goin' to give you a lift now—you just watch me.

MAGGIE: Oh, that's all right, Jim. The only thing is—I do wish you'd written to Mother.

JIM: I ought to have, Maggie, I know. If I'd only struck it rich, I could of sent some money home; but all I could scrape up seemed to go, somehow, 'n Mother kep' teasin' me to send for her till I just dreaded to get a letter. I couldn't cook up anything more to put her off with—so then I had to stop writin'.

MAGGIE: Why—Mother doesn't know yet! I must tell her, this minute. Oh, Jim, I'm so glad!

[*She flings her arms around his neck and kisses him rapturously, then goes upstairs. Lura makes another charge upon Jim's pockets and in spite of his efforts to defend them pulls out first a much soiled handkerchief, then a very flat leather purse, and a cigar case.*]

LURA [*with disappointment as each article is disclosed*]: Oh, a handkerchief! A purse! What's that? [Jim opens it for her.]

JIM: It's a case for cigars, Sis, but not a blame one left in it. Want to smell? [He holds it to her nose. She wrinkles it in disgust.]

LURA: Ugh! It's a nasty smell. I can feel what's in this pocket. [She traces the outline of some object with her hands, while Jim holds the opening so that she cannot get into it.] Just a bottle. A medicine bottle. Do you have to take medicine?

JIM [*with a grimace*]: Sometimes. But look here, little one. Christmas is quite a ways down the road, yet. And children that pry don't get any presents at all, you know.

LURA: Well, I won't then. [Jim sits down and she

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perches on the arm of his chair, rubbing her head against his sleeve as she talks. Jim takes her hands in his and fondles them.] Do you eat an egg for your breakfast?

JIM: Yes, if I can get it.

LURA [warningly]: It makes you fat. Mother does, but Maggie and I don't. We don't want to be fat. I want to fly, 'n you can't fly if you're fat. Maybe you're too fat. I shouldn't wonder . . . I don't want to fly like an angel, you know. They can't fly till they're dead. I want to fly like a bird. They fly all around while they're alive. I 'most flew once, but then I fell down.

JIM [with a laugh]: Where d'you learn so much about angels. In Sunday School?

LURA: Yes, but I don't go any more. Maggie won't let me. I think it's mean. But there are some boys that aren't very nice. Maggie doesn't want me to play with them. We have a Sunday School at home Sunday afternoons, but it isn't as nice as the real one. We can't sing, 'cause Mother is taking a nap. Shall I sing you a song I learned in the real Sunday School?

JIM: Yes.

[*Lura snuggles up closer to him and sings in a breathy, somewhat uncertain old voice, which still has something in it of the child-like quality.*]

LURA: "I think when I re-ad that sweet sto-ory of o-old,

When Je-sus was he-ere a-mong men,
How He ca-alled little chil-drun like la-ambs to his fold,
I would like to uv be-en with him then."

—Don't you think that's a nice song?

JIM [swallowing]: Yes, very nice, dear. You can sing it again for me, sometime.

LURA: Yes, and I know another—But I guess I'd ruther play face-tag. [*She darts her face toward his,*

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shouting, "Face-tag!" then averts it and runs across the room, keeping her face to the wall.]

JIM [strides across the room to her, takes her by the shoulder and turns her face around to him]: Face-tag. I see your face.

LURA [beating him with her fists]: No fair, no fair. Face-tag, I see yours. [She darts to the other side of the room, with her face averted. The stair-door opens and Mother plunges into the room. Her hair has been roughly combed back into an approximation of tidiness. She rushes upon Jim with arms outstretched.]

JIM: Hullo, Mother.

MOTHER: My son! My son! [She folds him in her arms and lays her head on his shoulder. Jim kisses her and puts his arms around her.]

JIM [in a cooing, caressing voice]: Guess the little Mumsie is pretty glad to see her big boy, isn't she?

MOTHER [in a choked, hysterical voice]: Glad! Oh, Jim, you don't know what I've suffered.

JIM [patting her arm soothingly]: Been lonesome for her big boy, has she? Well, it's all over now. Come and tell him all about it. [He leads her to an easy chair and sits on the floor beside her, his head leaning against her knee. She strokes his hair and frequently bends down to kiss his forehead or his ear. Lura brings a little hassock, and a battered, old picture-book and seats herself near the stove where the light from it falls on her book. She looks up from time to time, listening to what is said.]

MOTHER: Oh, Jim, my darling, why didn't you write to your Mother?

JIM: Why, Mumsie dear, I couldn't write any more till I had some good news for you. I thought every year I was going to make a haul, but I didn't—and—well,

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what was the use, saying the same old things and never making good?

MOTHER: I could have sent you some money, Jim, to make a start with, if I'd only known where to send it. Not much, of course, but I've been saving it for you all these years.

JIM: Dear little Mumsie! But I guess you and Maggie need it worse than I do.

MOTHER: I don't need anything but you, Jim. Oh, you *will* stay with me, won't you—as long as I can be with you? It won't be many years now—[She breaks into a sob and weeps into her handkerchief for a moment, then heroically smiles through her tears. Jim rises and puts his arms around her, laying his cheek against hers.] You will, won't you, my boy?

JIM [fervently]: I will, Mumsie, darling. I'll never leave you again.

MOTHER [solemnly]: This is the happiest moment of my life. If you only knew what I have gone through in these thirty years, shut up day after day with a human sewing-machine and an everlasting baby!

[*Lura looks up from her book.*]

JIM [quickly]: Lura, dear, don't you want to go upstairs and help Maggie? I guess she's getting my room ready for me.

LURA [*pouting*]: It's cold upstairs, 'xcept in Mother's room.

MOTHER: Don't bother about her. She doesn't understand.

LURA [*indignantly*]: I do, too. I understand every word you say, so there now.

MOTHER [*shrugging her shoulders and turning wearily to Jim*]: There, you see what I've had to endure. I wonder I have kept my own senses.

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JIM: If it's cold upstairs, Lura, please tell sister Maggie to come down. We don't want her to catch cold, do we?

LURA: Well. [*She drops her book on the hassock and goes upstairs. Jim sits on the arm of Mother's chair.*]

MOTHER: She ought to be put in an institution. There are places enough for such people. I think it's a crime to let them live with us, don't you? You'll find my ideas very modern on all such questions. But I can't do a thing with Maggie. I'm positively afraid to speak to her again about it. You don't know how-fierce she can be if anyone says a word about Lura. And I felt so helpless here all alone with her. [*Her voice hints at tears.*]

JIM: Why, Mother, you wouldn't separate Lura from Maggie, would you? She'd be miserable, and I guess Maggie would too.

MOTHER [*acridly*]: I don't know why I should be the only one to bear things.

JIM: But there's nothing repulsive about Lura. She just hasn't grown up. I don't see anything so dreadful in that.

MOTHER: Of course *you* can take it lightly, Jim. It's nothing to *you*. But just suppose you were— Oh, I can hardly say it—her mother? Oh, it's too horrible! I think I should have gone mad pretty soon, if you hadn't come. You have no idea what I've been through! Many a day I've had to sit from early morning till far into the night reading some exciting book that would keep these dreadful thoughts away. I didn't know *what* I might do. And I wanted my boy to find his mother, when he came home. [*She lowers her voice on the last sentence and buries her face on Jim's shoulder.*]

JIM [*caressing her hair*]: I wish you wouldn't feel

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that way about it, Mother. Poor little Lura! It's worse for her than it is for any of us.

MOTHER [*firmly, raising her head in protest*]: I don't think so at all. *She* is happy enough. And Maggie doesn't mind. *I* have all the suffering. But that seems to be a mother's lot.

JIM: Ssh.

[*Maggie enters, followed by Lura.*]

MAGGIE: Your room's all ready, Jim. It's not very warm, I'm afraid, but you must pop into bed as quick as you can.

JIM [*rising and stretching himself*]: Well, that sounds good. But I'm going to talk to you a while, Sis, before I turn in.

MOTHER [*jealously*]: Why you've been visiting with Maggie all the evening! I must have my boy now. Come up to my room, dearest, and we'll have one of our old bedtime talks. [*Sentimentally.*] I wonder if you remember them as I do.

JIM [*grimly*]: Yes, I remember them. But I guess I'll make a bee line for my room tonight. I'm fair dopey for sleep. Haven't had much lately.

MOTHER: Come right up with me, then, and after we've had our little talk I'll tuck you in, just as I always used to. [*Jim makes an involuntary grimace, which Mother catches.*] What is it, Jim, dear? Are you in pain anywhere?

JIM: A grumble in a tooth once in a while, that's all.

MOTHER: You poor, dear boy! And you never said a word about it. I shall give you a tooth-plaster to put on it.

JIM: No, thanks, Mother. The toothache for mine. Well good-night, Maggie-girl. [*Aside, as he kisses her.*] See you later—if I can work it. [*He takes Lura's face*

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between his hands and kisses her on both cheeks.] Good-night. Sleep tight.

LURA [giggling delightedly]: Good-night. Sleep tight.
[Mother advances to Lura with an air of nerving herself to do a beautiful act, and kisses her kindly on the forehead.]

MOTHER: Good-night, Lura.

LURA [a little mystified]: Goo'-night.

[Mother goes to Maggie and prints a kiss on her cheek. Maggie returns the kiss warmly, her arms about Mother.]

MAGGIE: Good-night, Mother. I'm so glad. You must sleep well tonight.

[Jim opens the stair-door for Mother. Mother draws Jim to her, and stands with an effect of tableau, at the door, as she speaks with sad sweetness.]

MOTHER: I am far too happy to sleep, but I hope my children will.

[Mother and Jim go upstairs.]

MAGGIE: Come here, dear, and let me unfasten your dress. [She sits down and Lura backs up to her, while Maggie unbuttons her dress, unties her hair ribbon, takes out her comb, and braids her hair loosely for the night.]

LURA: I don't have to ask God any more to send brother Jim home, do I? 'Cause he's here. [She laughs.]

MAGGIE: No, dear, but you might thank God for sending him.

LURA: Aw ri'. Will he play with me in the morning after I've taken Mother's breakfast up?

MAGGIE: Maybe for a little while, dear. But he'll probably have to go to his work pretty soon.

LURA [disappointedly]: Oh, is he going to work every day, too?

MAGGIE: I hope so, dear. [Giving her a little push as she finishes braiding her hair.] There, go and get on your nightie. Hang your clothes neatly over the chair, so you

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can dress fast in the morning. [Lura goes behind the screen. She calls.]

LURA: He eats an egg for his breakfast—when he can get one.

MAGGIE: Well, I'm afraid he can't have one to-morrow morning. There's only one for Mother. [She looks toward the stairway door from which Jim enters noiselessly, shoes in hand. He shuts the door without a sound, makes a gesture of silence to Maggie, hastily pulls on his shoes, picks up his overcoat and hat from the chair and puts them on.]

MAGGIE [fearfully]: Oh, Jim, where are you going?

JIM: Damned if I know. I've got to get out. That's all.

MAGGIE [as if stunned]: Are you going away-tonight?

JIM: You bet I am. The quicker the sooner. Before she gets her claws in me, the old vampire. What the hell I ever came back for— [He lifts his hands and drops them, shaking his head, in a gesture of hopeless incomprehension.]

MAGGIE [breathlessly]: But Jim, you *mustn't*—it will kill her to have you go off like this.

JIM: If she stood in that door now, I'd shoot her to get out. That's how I feel.

MAGGIE: Oh, no, Jim. Don't say that. How can you mind *anything* she does, when you know how she loves you?

JIM [disgustedly]: Loves me! Aw, Maggie, you've got too much sense to swallow all the talk she hands out. Do you s'pose I'd mind the kissin'-matches, an' tears leaked all over me or any of the rest of it, if there was anything *to* it, really? But you know there ain't. What'd you s'pose Mother cares about *me*—what I'm

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thinkin' about, or whether I'm square an' decent, or anything like that, just so as the pettin' and play-actin' goes right along? That's all *she* wants. But I'm damned if I'll play up to it any more. It makes me too sick.

[*Maggie sits looking at him, wide-eyed, clasping and unclasping her hands, then rising, she throws her arms about him in an anguish of entreaty.*]

MAGGIE: Oh, Jim dear, I know she didn't bring you up right. But can't you bring yourself up, now? Oh, do stay and help make things comfy for Lura. *Can't you, Jim?*

[*As she speaks Lura emerges from behind the screen with a red woolen wrapper over her nightgown, and red knitted slippers on her feet. Neither Maggie nor Jim notices her. She hesitates a moment, looking at them, then goes over to a chair near Maggie, draws it to the stove and puts her feet on the fender.*]

JIM [*gently detaching her arms and holding both her hands in his*]: Magsie, dear, I wish I could. You don't know how I hate to sneak off like this and leave you to carry everything. But you see yourself I couldn't stand it—not if I was paid to! And I bet you couldn't yourself, if you was in my place.

MAGGIE: But Jim—

JIM [*warmly*]: I tell you, I want to, bad enough. And I need to, if it comes to that. I haven't got a nickel. But I'd get pinched and sent up before I'd stay in this house. I feel just like I'm in jail every minute.

MAGGIE: I know, Jim, dear, but couldn't you *make* yourself stay—just till after Christmas? Oh, if you only *could!*

[*A sound on the stair brings Jim to his feet, he makes for*

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the outer door, but Mother bursts into the room, flings her arms about him, and breaks into hysterical sobs.]

MOTHER: Oh, my son! My son! Are you going to leave me? Are you going to leave your Mother?

JIM [*soothingly*]: No, no, Mother, of course not. Can't I go out and buy a cigar without—

MOTHER [*shrieking*]: No! No! Don't deceive me, Jim. You were going to leave me. You might as well kill me now. It would be kinder.

JIM [*impatiently*]: Mother, won't you listen to me? I tell you I'm only going out to buy a cigar.

MOTHER: Maggie, tell me the truth. Is he going to leave me?

[*Maggie is silent. Mother looks from her downcast face to Jim and falls into a chair, moaning piteously.*]

MOTHER: My son, my only son! I might have known this cup of joy would be dashed from my lips. Oh, God, let me die!

[*Lura retreats to the open door of the stairway, watching her mother, with fascinated, terror-filled eyes. She makes several futile moves toward Maggie, but Mother and Jim are between and she does not venture. After a moment Maggie sees her, goes over to her and puts her arm around her.*]

MAGGIE: Go right up to bed now, Lura, dear.

LURA [*shaking her off*]: I don't want to. Is brother Jim going away? [*A muffled shriek from Mother.*]

JIM [*under his breath*]: Damnation! [*Louder.*] Mother, I do have to go away for a few days, and you see why I was afraid to tell you—you cut up so rough. It isn't exactly pleasant for me. And there's no need of making such a fuss. I'll come back to spend Christmas with you—

[*Mother rises and with a heart-broken wail again flings herself upon him.*]

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MOTHER: Oh, my son, take me with you. No matter where you are going! I'll live in a cellar with you—or anywhere—or tramp the streets. Other people are nothing to me. I only want you. Think how—all these years— [Her voice trails off and is choked in sobs.]

JIM [*moved in spite of himself*]: There, there, Mother, don't cry so. You can't go with me till I get a place to take you to, of course, but just as soon as I find one, I'll send for you.

MOTHER [*breaking from him and taking a stand against the door*]: You must trample over your mother's dead body, if you leave this house without her!

MAGGIE [*springing to her in terror and trying to drag her from the door*]: Oh, Mother, don't say that. Don't stand there!

[*Mother pushes her aside. Lura runs to Maggie and clings to her speechlessly.*]

JIM: Don't be afraid, Maggie. I won't hurt her. [*He turns to Mother with an air of decision.*] Well, Mother, all right. If you've got to go, get your togs together. But remember I've warned you. Don't blame me for what you get into.

MOTHER [*kissing him rapturously*]: Oh, my darling boy! I don't care what I get into. I can endure anything if I'm only with you. [*In lowered voice.*] And you know I have some money—a little—for us both.

JIM [*flinching from her*]: Aw, cut that out.

MOTHER [*bravely wiping her eyes*]: Well, I'll be ready in five minutes.

JIM: All right. [*Mother starts toward the stairway, but stops, casts a suspicious glance on Jim and Maggie, goes back to the door, locks it, and takes the key with a defiant air.*]

JIM [*disgustedly*]: Oh, I say, Mother!

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MOTHER [*with dignity*]: My life's happiness is at stake, Jim. I cannot afford to risk it. [She goes out.]

JIM: Well, isn't that the limit? Good-bye, Maggie, I'll send you the first money I can lay hands on. Sure, I will. Good-bye, Lura. Be a good girl.

[*He runs up the shade, opens the window, and vaults out of it. A shriek is heard from above, and Mother rushing down the stairs precipitates herself toward the window. Maggie intervenes, and prevents her jumping out of it. Lura looks at them in wide-eyed terror and screams shrilly as Maggie's words give her the clue to what is happening.*]

MAGGIE: Mother, you'll kill yourself!

MOTHER: Kill myself! Yes, I will. And you shan't stop me—you double-faced hypocrite, you! You drove him away, I know you did! My only son! [She pushes Maggie from her in a fury. Maggie totters against the chest of drawers. Lura, shrinking against the wall, begins to cry.]

MAGGIE: Oh, Lura, dear, don't. Please go upstairs. It's so cold here, too. [She closes the window, takes Lura in her arms and tries to hush her crying.]

MOTHER [*spitefully*]: Yes, it would be too bad if that fifty-year old cry-baby should take cold. But you can drive my only son out of the house, the only comfort of my last years, and kill me with loneliness and grief—[*sobbing*]—and that's all right. You don't care anything about that. Oh, my son, my son! The only creature I ever loved has been driven from me. And I am alone.

MAGGIE [*sharply*]: Why do you say I have driven him away? I did everything I could to keep him.

MOTHER [*sneeringly*]: Yes, you did! I know well enough what you did. You tried to pull me away from the door, so he could go and leave me. And why did he want to leave me? I never spoke a word of blame to

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him. I was all love and tenderness. But you made him feel he wasn't welcome here. I know all about you, Miss Maggie.

MAGGIE: But I didn't—I didn't at all.

MOTHER: You needn't tell me. That's why he went away the first time. I saw it all then, but I was powerless. All my life long you have separated me from my son, my only son. Perhaps God will forgive you, but I never shall. Never. [Lura sobs louder.]

MAGGIE: Mother, *please* don't talk so before Lura. She'll go upstairs in a minute, but it frightens her so.

MOTHER [*with shrill hysterical laughter*]: Lura! There's another attraction for our happy home! An idiot as well as a Pharisee! No wonder he didn't care to stay.

MAGGIE [*putting Lura aside and advancing upon Mother with a threatening aspect*]: Never let me hear that word from you again! Never as long as you live!

MOTHER [*cowering against the wall, but essaying a weak defense*]: I shall say just what I please, Miss Maggie—

MAGGIE [*seizing her by the shoulders and shaking her slightly to emphasize her words*]: You will not. Do you hear me? Never as long as you live.

MOTHER [*in a quavering voice of abject terror*]: No—no—I won't. Let me go, Maggie. [She tries to twist herself out of Maggie's grasp.]

MAGGIE [*sternly, with a parting shake*]: See that you don't, then.

MOTHER [*throwing herself upon Maggie with a burst of tears*]: Oh, Maggie, don't you turn against me, too! I'm a poor, broken old woman, and my only son has cast me off.

MAGGIE [*taking Mother in her arms*]: I'll never turn against you, Mother, dear. You can do *anything* to me,

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but you mustn't hurt Lura. [With a sudden fierceness, holding Mother off by the shoulders and looking her squarely in the eyes.] I'll—I'll kill you, if you do.

MOTHER [*sobbing wildly*]: Oh, I won't, I won't. But you love her best and nobody cares about me.

MAGGIE [*patting her shoulder tenderly*]: I love you too, dear. But I've got to make Lura happy. I used to think that maybe things would be different when Jim came home, but she has no one but me to look to now.

MOTHER [*with muffled sobs*]: But I have no one but you either. I want you to take care of me.

MAGGIE: I will, dear. I'll take care of you both—my two children. [She smiles half-whimsically at Mother, and keeping one arm about her, holds out the other to Lura, who timidly slips into it.]

LURA [*in a quavering voice, clinging to Maggie*]: Doesn't brother Jim like me, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Of course he does, darling. Mother didn't understand. And Maggie loves you, hard.

[*Lura snuggles closer and heaves a long, fluttering sigh of relief.*]

LURA [*almost inaudibly*]: I'm not an idiot, am I, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Indeed you're not. And I'm not a Pharisee either. Mother didn't know what she was saying—she was so disappointed. Did you, Mother?

MOTHER [*dramatically*]: I was crazed with grief. My only son had forsaken me, had trampled under foot the love of the mother who had watched and wept for him thirty years. No wonder I was— [Her voice trails off in sobs. *Lura shrinks from her, still holding to Maggie.*]

MAGGIE: I guess Jim couldn't help it, Mother. He's never learned to do hard things. But maybe he will, sometime, and then—

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MOTHER: He will *never* come back to me. [Thrusting her hand into her bosom and bringing out a packet.] Here, Maggie, this is the money I had saved for him by the self-denial of years. I can never help him with it, now. Take it and spend it for yourself and Lura—[She breaks into uncontrollable weeping.]

MAGGIE [taking the packet and glancing at it with some surprise]: Oh, thank you, Mumsie, dear. Why, what a lot of bills. I believe there's enough to pay for the roof! [Embracing Mother ecstatically.] Just think how snug and tight we'll be all next winter!

MOTHER [striking a tragic attitude]: The lid of my coffin will cover me then. I shall not burden you long. Some morning you will find me cold and stiff in my bed—

[Lura shudders and shrinks from her.]

MAGGIE [putting her hand over Mother's mouth]: Hush, dear, I can't allow my children to say things like that.

MOTHER [after a visible struggle]: All right, [she swallows hard]—Mother. I'll try to be a good girl.

MAGGIE [kissing her warmly]: That's right, dear. Then will you go straight upstairs to bed, now? It's after ten. I'll come and tuck you up in a minute.

MOTHER [in a dull, hopeless tone]: I might as well.

MAGGIE: Good-night, dear.

MOTHER: Good-night. [She goes out, closing the stair-door behind her.]

MAGGIE [pulling a chair close to the stove]: Warm your feet a minute, darling, before you run up to bed. [Lura sits with her feet on the fender. Maggie moves about the room, setting it in order.]

LURA [in wondering tones]: Is Mother going to play being a little girl now?

MAGGIE [wearily]: I guess so.

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LURA [*sagely*]: Maybe she's tired playing Mother. Is she going to be a good little girl or a bad little girl?

MAGGIE [*with a sigh which she turns into a laugh*]: We aren't any of us good all the time, are we? The Wicked Fairy sometimes lays a spell on us, you know.

LURA [*eagerly*]: And somebody must take it off again —like little Bright-Eyes. Oh, *Magsie!* [She jumps up from her seat and runs over to hug Maggie, ecstatically.]

MAGGIE [*putting her arm about Lura*]: What is it, dearie?

LURA [*excitedly*]: I'll be little Bright-Eyes, an' Mother can be the Dragon, an' you can be the Good Fairy that tells me what to do. An' when it comes summer, I'll bring her every kind of flower to smell of, and the smell of one of them will take off the spell!

MAGGIE [*heartily*]: Sure enough! That's a game we can play all by ourselves, isn't it? Nobody else will know. [She kisses Lura with lingering tenderness.] Now you're good and warm, aren't you, sweetheart? Jump into bed fast, and Maggie will come, right away.

LURA: All right. [She kisses Maggie and gives her two "bear hugs". Standing by the stair-door, she swings it thoughtfully to and fro.]

LURA: I'm not going to ask God to send brother Jim home again.

MAGGIE: He won't, dear. Now scamper upstairs.

[Lura goes upstairs. Maggie locks the window and puts coal on the fire. She picks up Lura's picture-book from the hassock, clasps it passionately to her breast, and lays her cheek against it for a moment before replacing it on the table. The tender brooding smile of a mother lights her face. She extinguishes the lamp, and, in the darkness, is heard wearily ascending the stairs.]

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

CHARACTERS

HELGA, the girl from the Marsh Croft
PER MARTENSSON, her betrayer
THE JUDGE
GUDMUND ERLANDSSON, a young farmer, heir of Närlunda
ERLAND ERLANDSSON, Gudmund's father
INGEBORG, Gudmund's mother
HILDUR, Gudmund's fiancee
THE COUNCILMAN, Hildur's father
THE COUNCILMAN'S WIFE, Hildur's mother
KARIN, Hildur's sister
THORWALD LARSSON, a young poet } friends of
HUGO ANDERSSON, a student at Upsala } Gudmund
INGRID, a housemaid
OLGA, a barmaid
A Swiss Pedlar
A Constable
Spectators in the Courtroom
Riders
Musicians

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The Courtroom of a rural district in Sweden. The Judge, a middle-aged man, with a cynical expression and an irritable manner, sits at a heavy table strewn with papers, right front. Deal benches run from front to back of the stage. Half a dozen spectators, mostly farmers, occupy the benches further from the table. The Judge and the spectators, in common with all other characters except the pedlar, wear the peasant costumes of Värmland.

Gudmund Erlandsson sits nearest the audience. He is dressed smartly in a short hunting jacket, a small gray felt hat and top boots into which his trousers are tucked. He looks honest and kindly. At first, he, like the other spectators, glances at Helga somewhat contemptuously; but as the case proceeds, he leans forward to look at her with an expression of unconcealed admiration.

On the bench in front, nearest the Judge's table, but sitting far from one another, are Per Martensson, a prosperous farmer of about forty, with a bold and dashing appearance, and Helga, a young servant girl, not more than eighteen years of age, with an oval face, delicate features, and pale brown hair curling softly about her head. She wears a Swedish peasant costume consisting of a skirt of dark blue wool reaching to the ankle, and a yellow apron tied with leather strings from whose ends dangle little tassels, a bodice of red cloth over a white waist, red stockings, low shoes and a red cap. Her eyes are swollen with weeping. She twists a drenched handkerchief nervously in her hands.

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JUDGE [*in a loud voice*]: Next case. [Fussing with papers on the desk, finally fishing out one, adjusting his eye glasses, and reading from it in a loud voice.] Helga Nilsdotter, plaintiff, against Per Martensson, defendant. Are the parties here? [*He glances at Helga and Martensson. Martensson nods easily and Helga bows her head into her handkerchief in a fresh burst of tears.*]

JUDGE [*impatiently*]: Helga Nilsdotter, stand up. [*Helga rises with an attempt to wipe away her tears. She looks steadily down at the Judge's table, twisting her handkerchief in her hands. The spectators nudge each other and smile knowingly.*]

JUDGE [*irritably pounding the table with his fists, as he notes these glances*]: Order in the court! What is your name?

HELGA [*in a trembling voice*]: Helga Nilsdotter.

JUDGE [*writing down each answer before he asks the next*]: Your age?

HELGA: Eighteen last April.

JUDGE: Residence?

HELGA: The Marsh Croft.

JUDGE: Occupation?

HELGA: General servant,—that is, I was. [*She breaks into silent weeping.*]

JUDGE: Do you know Per Martensson?

HELGA: Yes, sir,—I worked in his family.

JUDGE: When?

HELGA: From January to August last year.

JUDGE: What are you bringing suit against him for?

HELGA [*with bowed head, in a low, tremulous voice*]: He is the father of my child and I cannot support it. No one wants me in service now, and the child will starve.

JUDGE: You want an order from the Court to compel Per Martensson to support this child?

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HELGA: Yes, sir.

JUDGE: You say Per Martensson is the father of the child?

HELGA: Yes, sir.

JUDGE: Are you quite sure?

HELGA [with surprise]: Yes, sir. [Snickers from the spectators.]

JUDGE [pounding the desk again]: Order in the Court. [with an access of severity in his manner.] You know what an oath is?

HELGA: Yes, sir.

JUDGE: Will you swear, on this Bible, that Per Martensson is the father of your child?

HELGA: Yes, sir.

JUDGE [severely]: Do you know that if you swear falsely on a Bible, your soul is lost forever? There is no salvation for the perjurer in this world or the next.

HELGA [shuddering]: Yes, I know.

JUDGE: Think well, then, before you swear that Per Martensson is the father of your child.

HELGA: It is the truth.

JUDGE: Step nearer. Lay your hand on the Bible—so—now repeat after me. I swear before God—

HELGA: I swear before God—

JUDGE: That Per Martensson—

HELGA: That Per Martensson—

JUDGE: Is the father of my child—

HELGA: Is the father of my child.

JUDGE [leaning back in his chair and surveying her sternly]: So you want me to compel Per Martensson to support this child. Why cannot your parents take care of it?

HELGA: Oh sir, they are so poor—The Marsh Croft gives them scant food for themselves alone. And I am

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a burden on them now. We shall all starve together unless Per—[*Her voice is choked with sobs.*]

JUDGE [*sternly*]: That is the misery that sin brings, Helga Nilsdotter. You cannot expect decent people to employ you in their houses now.

HELGA [*weeping*]: No, sir. But the child has done no wrong.

JUDGE: He suffers for the sins of his parents. You have applied to Per Martensson for aid?

HELGA: He will not see me. Three times I have been to the farm, but the door was closed against me. I waited by the road to speak to him, but he cast me off and would not listen. Indeed, I would not bring disgrace upon him if I could help it, but I have nowhere else to turn.

JUDGE: No man can be compelled to support a child merely because some woman chooses to say it is his. That will do for you, Helga Nilsdotter. Per Martensson, stand up. [*Martensson rises.*] What is your name?

MARTENSSON: Per Martensson.

JUDGE: Residence?

MARTENSSON: The old Martensson farmstead.

JUDGE: Occupation?

MARTENSSON: Farmer.

JUDGE: Do you know Helga Nilsdotter?

MARTENSSON [*carelessly*]: Yes. She was employed for a time as servant in my household.

JUDGE: Are you the father of her child?

MARTENSSON: I am not. [*Helga starts in amazement and looks at him. He looks straight at the judge.*]

JUDGE: Did you ever carry on an intrigue with her?

MARTENSSON: Never. [*Helga stares at him in undisguised astonishment.*]

JUDGE: Will you swear to these statements?

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MARTENSSON: I will. [The handkerchief Helga has been twisting in her hands falls to the floor. An expression of doubt and perplexity crosses her face as if she cannot believe what she has heard.]

JUDGE: Place your hand upon the Bible. So. [Helga half rises from her seat and sinks back again.] Now repeat after me. I swear before God—

MARTENSSON [in a low stumbling voice]: I swear before God—

HELGA [rising in terror]: Oh stop! [She sweeps Martensson's hand off the Bible and seizing the book, holds it close to her breast in defensive attitude. The Judge pounds the table furiously.]

JUDGE: What are you doing, woman? Put the Bible down.

HELGA [bursting into tears]: He shall not take the oath. He shall not.

JUDGE: What is the matter with you? What business have you with the Bible?

HELGA: He must not take the oath.

JUDGE [sharply]: Are you so determined to win your suit?

HELGA [in a high, agitated voice]: No. No. I want to withdraw the suit. I don't want to force him to swear falsely. He mustn't lose his soul.

JUDGE: Are you out of your mind?

HELGA [slowly and earnestly looking into the Judge's face]: Let me withdraw the suit. He is the father of my child. I am still fond of him. I don't want him to be lost forever. [The Judge looks at her almost incredulously, then with a sudden irradiation of his stern face. The spectators breathe a quick sigh of relief and satisfaction. They gaze at Helga with something approaching reverence in their expression.]

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JUDGE [*after an instant's silence*]: It shall be as you wish, my child. The case shall be stricken from the calendar. [*He starts to draw a line through his paper.*]

MARTENSSON [*starting forward*]: But I—

JUDGE: Well, what is it? Have you anything to say?

MARTENSSON [*hanging his head and speaking almost inaudibly*]: Well—no. I dare say it is best to let it go that way.

JUDGE [*looking contemptuously at him*]: The hearing is adjourned. [*He rises, walks around the table and offers his hand to Helga.*] Thank you! [*She shakes hands with him in some bewilderment, looking wonderingly up into his face.* Per Martensson slinks out of the door, and the spectators follow him, casting glances of respect and admiration back at Helga, who sinks down again listlessly upon the bench. *The Judge leaves the room, and after a moment she rises to go, but stops halfway to the door overcome with another gust of tears.*]

[Gudmund, who, as one of the spectators, has been visibly moved by Helga's action, returns to the room just as she abandons herself to her grief, and stands for an instant irresolute in the doorway. He comes in a few steps, but she does not hear him. He listens to her inarticulate bursts of grief and makes as if to go, but finally shuffles slightly with his feet so that she hears and springs up, choking down her sobs and standing all aquiver in pose of flight.]

GUDMUND [*in a soothing voice*]: Don't be afraid, Helga. I want to speak to you.

HELGA: It is not best for any honest young man to be seen speaking to me, Gudmund Erlandsson.

GUDMUND [*with conscious pride*]: It will not hurt me. Tell me, what can you do now, Helga? How will you live—and your child?

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HELGA [*choking down a sob*]: I do not know.

GUDMUND: I will ask my mother to employ you at the farm. Since she was ill she needs some one to be feet for her—to run errands for her and to wheel her about in her chair.

HELGA [*clasping her hands in an ecstasy of gratitude*]: It is a kind thought, Gudmund, and God will bless you for it. But [*sadly*] Mother Ingeborg will not want me in her house.

GUDMUND: Nonsense, Helga. Of course, she will. I will tell her what you have done today, and she will see that you are not a bad girl.

HELGA: I am not a bad girl. But I did wrong. And it will not be forgotten.

GUDMUND: You wait and see. Why you were only seventeen! And you've got fifty years more to make it right in!

HELGA [*sobbing and wringing her hands*]: Oh Gudmund, don't. I can't make it right, *ever*. There is only one thing to do now, and I shall do it.

GUDMUND: One thing, Helga? And what is it?

HELGA [*in a low voice*]: Do not ask me, Gudmund. It concerns me only.

GUDMUND: Do you mean—What *do* you mean, Helga?

HELGA: I will not tell you. It is nothing to you, nor to anyone.

GUDMUND: It is something to me, and to all of us, Helga, after today. You have given us something that we may remember when there seems to be no goodness in the world.

HELGA [*surprised*]: I?

GUDMUND: Did you not see how the Judge wished to shake your hand?

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HELGA: It was kind of him. And you, too, have been kind to me. But there is not enough for the four of us on the Marsh Croft, and I cannot tell my father and mother that Per Martensson will not help us—
[She breaks off with a sob.]

GUDMUND [moving a step toward her and patting her hand soothingly]: Poor little Helga!

HELGA [snatching her hand away, covering her face and breaking into a flood of tears]: I must go away where—I can never—come back again. Then little Nils can have enough to eat.

GUDMUND: Helga! Are you thinking of the Marsh? [Helga nods vehemently without uncovering her face.]

GUDMUND [seizing both hands from her face and holding them tight in his]: Don't you dare, Helga Nilsdotter!

HELGA [struggling to free her hands]: Let me alone, Gudmund. I know very well what is best for all of us.

GUDMUND [shaking her gently]: You are a wicked girl, Helga. Do you want to lose your soul? You would not let Per Martensson throw his away today, and I will not let you, either.

HELGA [still sobbing]: It can't be a sin, Gudmund, to go out of the world when there is no place for you in it.

GUDMUND: But there is a place. I will talk with my mother and bring you word in the morning. Promise that you will wait till I come.

HELGA [after a pause, putting out both her hands to him in a gesture of impulsive gratitude]: I will wait, Gudmund.

GUDMUND [clasping her hands and looking solicitously into her eyes]: You will not be afraid to go home now, will you, Helga?

HELGA: No, I shall tell my parents that you will speak to Mother Ingeborg for me; and perhaps they will

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not be so angry, because I am to have no help from Per Martensson. [She drops her hands from his and turns away, as if to go.]

GUDMUND [taking a step toward her]: It is a long walk for you, Helga. You can ride with me as far as the Crossroads.

HELGA: Oh no, Gudmund, I thank you with all my heart, but I will not ride with you.

GUDMUND [brusquely]: Nonsense, Helga. Why not?

HELGA: It is not fitting that I should ride with you, Gudmund, and you understand this quite well. I will not repay your kindness by leading anyone to think less of you.

GUDMUND: What do I care what low-minded fools think? Come along, Helga. I'll drive my horse up to the door. [Starts to go.]

HELGA: Forgive me, Gudmund, but I cannot ride with you. Good-bye. [Sits down resolutely and begins to loosen her shoes.]

GUDMUND: What are you doing?

HELGA: I shall carry my shoes. They are new and it is a long walk.

GUDMUND [with a tender, teasing note in his voice]: You are a headstrong girl, Helga. I must tell my mother that you are one to take your own way, and perhaps she will not want to employ you.

HELGA [sorrowfully, but resolutely, slipping off her shoes and stockings]: You must tell her what you will, Gudmund, but I will never do you an injury. Good-bye to you.

GUDMUND [half annoyed, but indulgent]: Good-bye, Helga Headstrong. I shall speak only good of you to my mother. But you must be more docile when you are under her rule. [He stands in the door for a moment,

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smiling protectingly down at her. She smiles up at him with complete trustfulness.]

HELGA: I will try, Gudmund. [Exit Gudmund.

Helga rapidly stuffs her stockings into her shoes, ties the shoes together and hangs them about her neck, pins her skirt up around the bottom, opens the door a crack and peers out to make sure that no one is outside, then goes quietly out].

CURTAIN.

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

ACT I.

Six weeks later. The living room at Narlunda: a spacious room with an immense fireplace occupying nearly all the right wall. Above the fireplace hangs a pole which passes through the holes of countless loaves of ring-bread, big as the wheel of a wheelbarrow, but thin as a wafer. Wide windows and a glass door at back, showing a garden in full bloom. The ceiling has massive beams and the floor is strewn with green twigs. Benches of heavy oak stand near the fireplace and against the walls. A heavy oak table covered with books and magazines is in the center of the room. A loom stands in one corner, and two spinning wheels near by. A door at left leads to the kitchen and bedrooms.

Helga is discovered, in Swedish costume as before, her yellow apron filled with fresh green twigs which she scatters on the newly scrubbed floor. As she works, she hums joyously a Swedish folk-song. When she talks, she is full of eager, unconscious gestures; her bubbling, childish laughter is frequently heard: and she seems altogether transformed from the despairing creature of the Prologue. She has covered all but a small section of the floor at the front of the stage, and finishes this as Gudmund enters, bearing a basket of cones for the fire. He sets it down by the hearth, after laying a few on the logs. Helga, meanwhile, tosses the last twigs from her apron, glances critically at a tall vase of wild appleblossoms on the table, loosens the branches from one another so that they stand out in graceful lines, and surveys the result with immense satisfaction.

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HELGA [*gazing rapturously at the apple-blossoms*]: Aren't they beautiful, Gudmund? Do you think Hildur will notice them?

GUDMUND: No doubt she will. And she will thank you, when I tell her that you gathered them for her.

HELGA: They are from the wild trees by the road. I could not get many,—the twigs were so gnarly and hard to break. Will you lend me your knife, Gudmund? I want to cut an armful of them and strew the driveway before her.

GUDMUND [*handing her the knife from his pocket, with an indulgent smile*]: But Hildur is not a queen, little one.

HELGA [*slipping the knife into the pocket of her apron*]: She will be queen of Närlunda,—after tomorrow. Then we shall dress the house with birch boughs for the bride. But we would do that for anyone you married, these are for Hildur herself. [*As the talk goes on, she deftly puts the finishing touches to the room, dusting the furniture, setting the books and magazines in order upon the table, etc. Gudmund standing by the fire, watches her.*]

GUDMUND: So Hildur is fond of apple-blossoms?

HELGA: I don't know. But they are like her. Don't you think so, Gudmund?—only too pink. She is whiter, —more like the orchard blossoms. Oh, Gudmund! [*She claps her hands in an ecstasy of appeal.*]

GUDMUND: What is it, little one?

HELGA: May I not cut branches from the orchard,—armfuls to strew before Hildur?

GUDMUND: Why, little Vandal! If you did that, we should have but a short crop of apples in the fall.

HELGA: But Hildur would rather have the blossoms now, than the apples next winter!

GUDMUND [*doubtfully*]: Would she? But what would the Councilman say? No doubt he would take back his

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word, even on the day before the wedding, and forbid his daughter to marry the poor farmer, who had no more sense than wealth. Since I am not so rich as the Councilman, Helga, I must try to be as prudent.

HELGA: But no one is as rich as the Councilman,—except, perhaps, the King himself.

GUDMUND [*laughing*]: Except the King. Very true, little Helga.

HELGA: But the King himself has no more beautiful home than you have, Gudmund. [*Looking about with affectionate admiration.*]

GUDMUND: You think so, Helga? Are you content then, to be here with us?

HELGA: Indeed, I am! Mother Ingeborg and all of you have been as kind as angels to me.

GUDMUND: Have you not been homesick for the forest? I have heard that one who belongs to the forest cannot help yearning for it.

HELGA: Oh yes, in the beginning, I was homesick; but not now, any more. At first,—but you mustn't speak of this to your mother.

GUDMUND: I will be silent, if you wish me to.

HELGA: I understood, of course, all the time, how well it was for me to be here; but there was something that took hold of me and wanted to draw me back to the forest. I felt as if I were deserting and betraying someone who had a right to me.

GUDMUND: It was, perhaps—[*He checks himself.*]

HELGA: No, it was not the boy I longed for. My mother had made him her own and he had no more need of me. It was nothing in particular. I felt as though I were a wild bird that had been caged and I thought I should die if I were not let out.

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GUDMUND [*smiling*]: To think that you had such a hard time of it!

HELGA [*smiling back at him*]: I didn't sleep a single night. As soon as I went to bed, the tears began to flow, and when I got up of a morning, the pillow was wet through.

GUDMUND: You have wept much in your time. But you are not homesick now?

HELGA: No, I have been cured. Shall I tell you how?

GUDMUND: Yes. Tell me.

HELGA: When I was the most unhappy, I asked Mother Ingeborg to let me go home on a Saturday evening, and remain over Sunday. I meant to tell my mother and father that I could never, no never, go back to Närlunda. But they were so happy because I had found service with good and respectable people, that I didn't dare to tell them.

GUDMUND [*softly*]: Poor little Helga!

HELGA: But I didn't need to tell them. For on Monday morning as I awoke and lay crying and fretting, because I knew I must return to the farm,—suddenly I remembered hearing that if one took some ashes from the hearth in one's home and strewed them on the fire in the strange place, one would be rid of homesickness.

GUDMUND: That was a remedy easy to take.

HELGA: Yes, but it has this effect also. Afterwards one can never be content in any other place. So, if one were to go away—

GUDMUND: Couldn't one carry ashes along to every place one moved to?

HELGA: No. It can't be done more than once. So it was a great risk to try anything like that.

GUDMUND [*laughing*]: I shouldn't have taken such a chance.

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HELGA: But I did. It was better than having to seem an ingrate in your mother's eyes and in yours, when you had tried to help me. So I brought a little ashes from home, and when no one was in, I scattered them over the hearth—[*She makes a gesture of scattering them over the hearth.*]

GUDMUND: And you believe this is what helped you?

HELGA: You shall judge. I thought no more about the ashes all that day. There was much to be done, and I went about the house grieving, exactly as before, until the fire was lighted on this hearth in the evening. After the milking was done, when I entered this room—

GUDMUND [*encouragingly*]: What then?

HELGA: As I lifted the latch, it flashed across my mind that I was going into our own cabin and that mother would be sitting by the hearth. This flew past like a dream, but when I came in, it seemed really good to enter,—it had not been so before. Your mother and the rest of you had never appeared so pleasant as you did in the firelight. You were no longer strangers to me, and I could talk to you about all sorts of things. I was so astonished that I could hardly keep from clapping my hands and shouting. I wondered if I had been bewitched; and then I remembered the ashes. [*She claps her hands in joyous recollection and looks up at him triumphantly.*]

GUDMUND [*teasingly*]: This is indeed marvelous. But what if sometime you had to leave Närlunda?

HELGA [*in a quivering voice, dropping her hands apart*]: Then I must long to come back again all my life.

GUDMUND [*laughing, but warmly*]: Well, I shall not be the one to drive you away. [*He stoops to put more cones on the fire. A sound is heard at the door on the left and Helga springs to open it. A wheel-chair, in which*

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sits Mother Ingeborg, a kindly, strong faced, gray haired woman of fifty, is propelled into the room by Erland Erlandsson, a man about the same age, partly bald and wearing a black skull cap. They both wear the peasant costumes of Varmland. Mother Ingeborg's manner is authoritative but benevolent, Erland's quiet and full of humorous understanding.]

HELGA [joyously]: Will you look at the room, Mother Ingeborg? Is all as you would have it here? [She takes the chair from Erland and, as the following talk goes on, wheels Mother Ingeborg about the room, until Mother Ingeborg smiles and nods approval. Gudmund and his father meanwhile confer in low tones near the fireplace.]

MOTHER INGEBORG: It is very well, my child. You have done all that I could, were my legs strong to bear me about. The Councilman's wife can find little amiss, I fancy, in our housekeeping. Eh, Erland?

ERLAND: There is no better housekeeper in all Sweden than Mother Ingeborg. Did not the Councilman's wife say so herself, when she first visited our home?

MOTHER INGEBORG: But that may have been a compliment. Today we shall know what she really thinks. If she hints that this and that should be altered, to make Närlunda a fit place for her daughter—

ERLAND: I want nothing altered here.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Nor I. But when Hildur, out of love for our Gudmund, leaves the wealth of Alvakra for our humble farmhouse, we surely can do whatever she or her mother may wish. It is but little after all.—Is the table spread, Helga?

HELGA: Yes, Mother Ingeborg.

MOTHER INGEBORG: And fresh linen laid in all the bedrooms?

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HELGA: Yes, Mother Ingeborg. Would you like to see all for yourself before they come?

MOTHER INGEBORG: I trust you as I would trust myself. There is no more than to do anywhere in the house?

HELGA: Only to cut the wild apple branches, which I would strew in the driveway. Shall I bring them in, now?

MOTHER INGEBORG: Go now, and be ready to show our guests in when they arrive.

[*During the last two speeches, Helga has moved Mother Ingeborg's chair nearer the fireplace. Now she adjusts one of the blinds so that the light does not shine directly in her face and smoothes the kerchief over one shoulder. Exit Helga. Mother Ingeborg looks after her fondly.*]

MOTHER INGEBORG: It was a good thought, Gudmund, to bring Helga here. I could hardly do without her now.

GUDMUND: She tries to please you,—one can see that.

MOTHER INGEBORG: And she is able to please me. Our house is kept as it used to be when I could be busy in it from morning to night. And I have had no care in all the preparations for the wedding. Everything is in readiness as if the fairies' hands had been at work here.

ERLAND: Helga is a good girl. It is well that she is with us, who will protect her, rather than with some Per Martensson.

[*Helga is seen without, opening the door wide for the Councilman, Mother Anna, and their daughters, Hildur and Karin. The Councilman is a pompous, aldermanic personage; his wife a stately, somewhat supercilious, but determinedly gracious Great Lady; Hildur a tall, beautiful girl of twenty, with a graceful assurance of manner that pleases rather than wins; Karin, two or three years younger than Hildur, has a round, boyish-looking face, with a*

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lively, good-humored expression. All wear the costumes of Värmland.]

ERLAND [advancing]: Welcome to Närlunda, friends.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Thanks for the last time, honored guests.

THE COUNCILMAN: I thank you, Erland Erlandsson, and you, Mother Ingeborg. [They shake hands with Erland and Mother Ingeborg and Gudmund. Helga closes the door, and stands near the Councilman's wife, ready to assist her in removing her cloak. Gudmund goes at once to Hildur and they talk apart, he holding her hands in his.]

MOTHER ANNA: How is it with you, Mother Ingeborg? No worse than usual, I hope!

MOTHER INGEBORG: No worse than usual, I thank you, Mother Anna. Are you also well,—and Hildur?—and Karin?

MOTHER ANNA: Very well, I thank you. [Hildur and Karin curtsy.] A thousand pardons Mother Ingeborg, for entering your respected house, with our outer wraps. But we could not resist the approach through your beautiful garden.

MOTHER INGEBORG: You are fully pardoned, Mother Anna. Helga will take your cloaks. [As Helga offers to remove her cloak, the Councilman's Wife surveys her coldly through a lorgnette.]

MOTHER ANNA [dropping her lorgnette but without lowering her voice]: Is that the Marsh Croft girl? [Hildur looks up keenly at Helga and, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, turns back to Gudmund.]

MOTHER INGEBORG [glancing apprehensively at Helga]: Yes. Leave the cloaks in the west bedroom, Helga.

[As Helga offers to take Hildur's cloak from her, the Councilman's wife intervenes, takes the cloak from her

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daughter and hands it to Helga without looking at her. She would do the same for Karin, but Karin makes her cloak into a roll and tosses it to Helga with a boyish, "Catch, Helga." Helga flashes a grateful smile at her as she catches the cloak. The Councilman's wife pushes determinedly between Karin and Helga, speaking to Karin in a low tone, with evident displeasure. As Mother Ingeborg addresses the Councilman's wife, Karin pirouettes over to Erland and engages him in animated talk.]

MOTHER INGEBORG: Once more let me thank you, Mother Anna, for your courtesy in permitting us to have the wedding here. Otherwise my infirmity would have prevented me from seeing my only son married. And that would have been hard to bear, I assure you.

MOTHER ANNA: Do not mention it, my dear Mother Ingeborg. The Councilman and I were happy to oblige you in so small a matter. Were we not, my dear?

THE COUNCILMAN: Delighted, I assure you.

KARIN: We get the best of that bargain, I think,— All the solemn, tiresome part here, then a jolly canter to Alvakra for the dancing and fun. Indeed it suits us very well, Mother Ingeborg.

MOTHER ANNA: My dear Karin!

MOTHER INGEBORG [*smiling indulgently at her*]: Then I am glad for you as well as for myself. Shall we go into the garden now, my friends? Erland cannot wait until after dinner to show you his young plum trees.

THE COUNCILMAN [*after glancing at his wife*]: We shall be charmed.

MOTHER ANNA: Delighted.

KARIN [*mischievously*]: I'll stay with Hildur. [*She casts a glance at Hildur and pretends to stagger against the wall, transfixed by the cold stare of disapproval which she gets in return.*]

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MOTHER INGEBORG: You can wheel me, Erland. The young people will join us when they wish. [Exeunt all but Gudmund and Hildur. *Gudmund holds the door open and closes it after Karin, giving her a playful shake, as, shielding her eyes with her arm, she affects to escape through it. Then he returns to take Hildur in his arms.*]

GUDMUND: Hildur! Dearest! [He kisses her passionately again and again. She yields herself to him for a moment and then pushes him away with a coquettish gesture.]

HILDUR: That will do, Gudmund. You must not smother me, you know.

GUDMUND [*thickly*]: I could kiss you to death. You were made to be kissed, Hildur,—and by me. [He tries to kiss her again.]

HILDUR [*smiling, but keeping him at a distance*]: No doubt. But I do not care to be kissed to death even by you. We shall be married many years, Gudmund, if God will. Do not let us take a pace we can't keep up.

GUDMUND: But,—but Hildur!—I can't be as sensible as you.

HILDUR [*calmly*]: Then I will be sensible for both. A wife must be so, often. And we have many things to settle today.

GUDMUND: Let the old folks settle them. While you are here, I shall think of nothing but you.

HILDUR: Mother will speak to Mother Ingeborg about that girl. Of course I cannot come to Närlunda while she is here.

GUDMUND [*thunderstruck*]: What girl?

HILDUR [*with a contemptuous smile*]: The girl from the Marsh Croft, naturally. You did not suppose I meant old Ingrid?

GUDMUND: You cannot come here if Helga—?

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HILDUR: You would hardly expect me to, would you?

GUDMUND: Why, of course I should. Mother could not get on without her.

HILDUR: She will not need her when I am here. And everyone knows it is not right to keep a girl of such character in a respectable house.

GUDMUND [*earnestly*]: But she is not a bad girl. She was very young when she first went out to service, and it was not strange that things went badly when she came across such a dastardly brute as Per Martensson.

HILDUR: That may be. But when a girl has once gone wrong, one never knows.

GUDMUND: But if we should push her out, she might meet with misfortune again, through no fault of her own.

HILDUR: Misfortune of that kind doesn't come without fault.

GUDMUND: How hard you are, Hildur. Surely you don't want to deprive Helga of her chance to live a good life?

HILDUR [*with a shrug of the shoulders*]: If that girl is to remain at Närlunda, I will never come here. I cannot tolerate a person of that kind in my house.

GUDMUND: You don't know what you are doing. No one understands so well as Helga how to care for mother. We have all been happier since she came. And I have given her my word that she should stay.

HILDUR: I shall not compel you to send her away.

GUDMUND: But you make it a condition of your marrying me. Hildur, do you want a husband who has broken his word?

HILDUR [*coldly*]: I want nothing at all. You shall please yourself in this matter.

GUDMUND [*hotly*]: Please myself! Yes, to be sure. I can please myself by breaking my word to Helga,

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pushing her out of the one refuge she has found, and marrying you. Or I can please myself by keeping my word to her and losing you. I shall be very happy, no doubt, either way! [He flings himself away from her, and sees through the window his mother's wheelchair approaching, pushed by Erland. He goes to the door and opens it.]

MOTHER INGEBORG [*cheerfully*]: Well, my children, are you not ready to go to the garden now? I have asked to be excused, Hildur, from making the rounds of the farm. I tire so easily. But I will wait you here. Send Helga to me, will you not, Erland?

ERLAND: Certainly, my dear.

GUDMUND: I will call Helga, mother. Will you excuse me, Hildur? Father will take you to your mother, I must speak with Mother Ingeborg before I join you. [Exit Gudmund.]

ERLAND [*offering his arm to Hildur with courtly courtesy and chattering volubly to cover the awkwardness of the moment*]: Will you come with me, gracious Hildur, and intercede with your worthy parents for my kitchen garden? I left them arguing about the potato patch. Mother Anna was for making it larger, by rooting up all my lettuce, radishes and chives; while the Councilman would plant fewer potatoes and more cucumbers. You will tell them, will you not, that when I want a baked potato I cannot be put off with a raw cucumber? And that when a salad is to be dressed, it cannot be done with rutabaga?

HILDUR [*smiling pleasantly at him and taking his arm*]: But you should tell them yourself, Erland Erlands-son. You can put it much more eloquently than I.

ERLAND: I will tell them the story of my father. He ordered a dish of blackberries once at a hotel in Stockholm, but the waiter said that they had no blackberries,

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"No blackberries," said my father, much annoyed,
"Well, then, bring me a couple of boiled eggs!" [He
laughs expectantly. Hildur looks puzzled.]

HILDUR: How very singular! And boiled eggs in the city are so seldom fresh.

ERLAND [*opening the door for her*]: Very true, my dear Hildur. The old gentleman should have known better. On the whole, I think I won't tell your honored parents about him. Probably they would not approve of him, either. [*Exeunt, as Gudmund enters.*]

GUDMUND: I have asked Helga to come to you, Mother. Has the Councilman's wife told you to send her away?

MOTHER INGEBORG: We shall have trouble about Helga, I fear, Gudmund. I will ask her not to appear again while they are here. Ingrid can serve the dinner.

GUDMUND [*grimly*]: It is as well the poor girl should not be insulted again. What did Mother Anna say to you?

MOTHER INGEBORG: She thinks it wrong for us to have Helga in service here; and impossible for her to remain after Hildur comes.

GUDMUND: Hildur said the same to me. They are well agreed. But I do not mean to send Helga away.

MOTHER INGEBORG: But Gudmund,—if you should lose Hildur?

GUDMUND: Then I must lose her. You could not get on without Helga, now.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Oh, my son, I would get on somehow, if only you were married to Hildur. It has been my dream for so many years!

GUDMUND: But what about my promise?

MOTHER INGEBORG: Did you promise Helga that she should stay here?

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GUDMUND: This morning, just before they came I said to her,—“I shall never be the one to drive you away.”

MOTHER INGEBORGB: Oh, Gudmund, why did you say that? But she will not hold you to it, I am sure she won’t.

GUDMUND: I shall hold myself to it. It is not best, mother, that I should give way to Hildur in this. She will think to rule me in all things and there will be unhappiness between us continually.

MOTHER INGEBORGB: But you love her, Gudmund, do you not?

GUDMUND: Twenty minutes ago, I loved her to distraction; and no doubt I shall again, when this has blown over. But just now I should like to shake her!

MOTHER INGEBORGB [*with a sigh*]: No doubt men often feel so. But you must be patient with her, Gudmund. Girls like her are brought up to think that way about girls like Helga. I was, too. But, perhaps, when you are married—.

[*Gudmund shrugs his shoulders doubtfully. Enter Helga. She is grave and has evidently been weeping.*]

MOTHER INGEBORGB [*kindly*]: Helga, my child, you have tired yourself with all these preparations. Now will you do me still another kindness? Take Ingrid’s place in the kitchen, so that all may be done well there. She is apt to be careless at the last. Let her serve dinner in your place, and after dinner, you may have a holiday for the afternoon.

HELGA: I understand, Mother Ingeborg. And after dinner, I will go to my home. It is best that I should leave you, now.

MOTHER INGEBORGB: Leave us, Helga?

HELGA: Yes, Mother Ingeborg. You gave me shel-

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ter when there was no one to open a door to me, and I will never leave you while you want me to stay. But it will be easier for all of you now, if I am no longer here.

GUDMUND: No, Helga. We do not wish you to go. You have made a place for yourself here, and you shall not be driven from it.

HELGA: I thank you, Gudmund. But I will not repay kindness with injury. Mother Ingeborg knows that it is best for me to go.

MOTHER INGEBORG: You are more generous than we, Helga. We do not want you to go,—any of us,—but, perhaps—for a time—there will be some way later, I am sure, for you to return to us.

HELGA: Good bye, Mother Ingeborg. Good bye, Gudmund. [She shakes hands with Mother Ingeborg and offers her hand to Gudmund, who refuses to shake it.]

GUDMUND [hotly]: I won't have it so, I tell you. Mother, why don't you tell her she must stay?

HELGA [quietly]: I will not stay, Gudmund, not even if Mother Ingeborg should bid me to. Good bye. [She turns, as if to go.]

MOTHER INGEBORG: Do not go now, my child. You must not walk all that long way. The master will drive you home this afternoon, after our guests have gone. And he will pay you your wages for the month.

HELGA: It is kind of you, but I am well able to walk.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Let him drive you, Helga. It is so little we can do—he will carry with him flax enough for six tablecloths and six dozen napkins, which you must weave for me.

HELGA: I thank you, Mother Ingeborg. The work will make us all happy.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Besides he will explain to your parents that we are parting with you now only because

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after Hildur comes, we shall not need so much help. And that when the weaving is finished, I will find you another good situation, where you will be safe and happy as you have been with us.

HELGA: I am very grateful to you, Mother Ingeborg, and my parents will be proud that I have pleased you. [Exit Helga, as Erland and the guests are seen approaching through the garden. They enter with a confused babble of thanks and compliments.]

MOTHER ANNA: I am enchanted, Mother Ingeborg. Your dairy—[She throws up her hands in an ecstasy of admiration.]

THE COUNCILMAN: A fine herd of Holsteins you have, Gudmund.

GUDMUND [as if aroused from a dream]: Hol— Oh, yes. Very fine indeed.

ERLAND [hastily]: The Councilman greatly admires our prize bull.

THE COUNCILMAN: A magnificent creature. I have no finer on my farm.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Did you drink a gourd of new milk, Hildur, as you did before?

HILDUR: We all did. It was delicious—so cool and sweet-smelling.

MOTHER ANNA: Quite a farmer's wife, already, is she not, Mother Ingeborg? [They all laugh and Hildur pretends to a pretty confusion. Enter Thorwald and Hugo, two young men of about Gudmund's age. Thorwald is slender and flaxen-haired, with large, lustrous, abstracted eyes. He carries a fiddle under his arm. Hugo is shorter and sturdier of build, with a shock of brown hair. He wears spectacles and looks like the typical University student.]

MOTHER INGEBORG: Here are our other guests!

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[*Gudmund springs to the door and flings it open, greeting them both with an obvious appearance of relief on their arrival. The two young men bow low over the hand of Mother Ingeborg and each of the other ladies, during the following speeches. Erland and the Councilman nod to them in friendly fashion.*]

GUDMUND [*heartily*]: Come in, old chaps, come in.

ERLAND: Welcome, my friends.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Thanks for the last time.

HUGO: I thank you, Erland Erlandsson, and you, Mother Ingeborg.

[*Thorwald only bows in acknowledgment of these greetings. After bending over Hildur's hand, he forgets altogether to salute Karin and retires to a corner whence he can stare unobserved at Hildur, while playing imaginary tunes in the air on the strings of his fiddle.*]

MOTHER ANNA [*patronizingly to Hugo as he bends over her hand*]: So here is our University student! What honors have you brought home to us, in Värmland, Hugo Andersson?

HUGO [*somewhat embarrassed*]: Nothing as yet, Mother Anna, I am sorry to say. But I have not spent my time in idleness.

MOTHER ANNA: I am glad to hear that, indeed. The young men of these days have so little sense of responsibility. And what are you doing for yourself, Thorwald Larsson?

HILDUR [*reproachfully*]: Thorwald is a poet, mother. We do not expect poets to work for money like other men.

THORWALD [*gazing at Hildur gratefully*]: I thank you, Hildur Ericsdotter. Everyone expects it but you, I think.

GUDMUND: But your father has let you off, now, Thorwald, hasn't he?—since you nearly killed yourself in the forest.

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THORWALD: Yes. He'd rather my head were a little cracked than broken outright.

HILDUR: How was it you were nearly killed, Thorwald Larsson?

THORWALD [*with a laugh*]: I tried my best to go into my father's business, as he wanted me to. But I could not tell one kind of lumber from another. And in the forest I would sometimes take a book of poems from my pocket and read it as I walked.

GUDMUND [*laughing uproariously*]: So one day he ran into a tree and broke his head open and lay unconscious till a searching party found him. Poor old Thorwald! [All laugh.]

MOTHER INGEBORG: Then your father has given up all hopes of making a timber merchant of you?

THORWALD: Yes. And what is more, he has given up a good income to me while he lives and has willed the business to me, under trustees, so I can go on forever writing poetry and playing the fiddle. What do you think of that for a man who hates poetry and music?

THE COUNCILMAN: Very extraordinary, upon my word!

THORWALD [*with feeling, speaking as if to Hildur alone*]: If I could make myself into the kind of a son he really wants by chopping myself into small pieces and putting them together some other way I'd do it in a minute. But I've got to disappoint him always.

HILDUR [*gravely*]: But someone must always be disappointed. And no doubt it is better to disappoint another than oneself.

THORWALD [*deeply impressed*]: How true that is! Not to disappoint oneself—I shall remember that.

KARIN [*irrepressibly*]: I'm so glad you've brought your fiddle, Thorwald. Now we can dance the crown off the bride's head.

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MOTHER ANNA: By no means, Karin—What are you thinking of?

THE COUNCILMAN [*shaking his head wisely*]: That would be unlucky. It should never be done until after the wedding.

KARIN [*exuberantly*]: Fiddlesticks! Bother! She isn't going to wear her wedding dress, is she? That's the only thing that's really unlucky. I've got to practice catching her crown.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Little madcap! Do you want to wear the bride's crown so soon?

KARIN: Indeed I do—I never get my own way at home. Please, Hildur! Strike up a dance, Thorwald. [She pulls Hugo and Erland, who stand near her, to the other side of the room and, standing between them, and holding each by the hand, begins to skip up and down like an impatient child.]

KARIN: Come, Hildur. Hurry up, Thorwald. [Thorwald looks at Hildur for permission to play, but she does not give it.]

HILDUR [*coldly*]: I have no crown.

KARIN [*dropping the hands of Hugo and Erland and looking about the room*]: Oh, I forgot that,—here, this will do. [She runs hastily to the vase of wild apple branches, and detaches two or three small sprays, pulling the rest impatiently out and dropping them on the table. She twists the small sprays with a few deft movements into a circle and puts it on Hildur's head.]

KARIN [*stepping back and viewing her handiwork*]: Behold the bride! I believe it's more becoming than the golden one will be. [Hildur takes the crown from her head and tosses it contemptuously away. Karin dexterously catches it.]

KARIN [*with bubbling laughter*]: Aha! I caught it

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that time. Little Karin may be your next bride after all!

HUGO [*adventurously*]: After all—what? Who is more likely? [*Karin drops him a curtsy.*]

KARIN: We must have more room. May we push back the table, Mother Ingeborg?

MOTHER INGEBOORG: Surely my child,—whatever you wish. [*Gudmund and Erland push back the table. While they are doing so, Karin turns to Hugo.*]

KARIN: Have you got a clean pocket handkerchief, Hugo? [*Hugo produces it.*] You can blindfold her, then. [*Laughingly Hugo advances towards Hildur, but Thorwald, as if impelled by a force he cannot resist, interposes between them.*]

THORWALD [*breathlessly*]: Oh, let Gudmund do it! [*Amazed, Hugo, Karin and Hildur stare at him for an instant, then look at Gudmund, who stands apart from the group, moodily abstracted, hearing nothing that has been said, and even unconscious of the attention suddenly focused upon him.*]

KARIN [*teasingly*]: Listen to the poet! Such fine feelings for our Gudmund, who never even thought of them himself! [*Hugo, Erland and Karin laugh loudly. Thorwald shrinks back in confusion. Hildur frowns and tosses her head slightly. Gudmund wakes up from his abstraction at the sound of his name.*]

GUDMUND [*with a forced laugh*]: What's the joke?

KARIN: Will your Highness, the Prince Consort, graciously allow your gentleman in waiting, Hugo, to bind the eyes of your fair Princess for the dance?

GUDMUND [*carelessly*]: Go ahead, old man.

HILDUR [*turning with a swiftly gracious movement to Thorwald and bending her head to him*]: Thorwald, will you, please? [*Thorwald, in an agony of embarrassment,*

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draws out his handkerchief and binds it about Hildur's eyes. Karin sets the apple blossom crown again upon Hildur's head, seizes upon her mother and forms with her, Erland, Gudmund and Hugo a ring about Hildur. The Councilman remains seated by Mother Ingeborg.]

KARIN: Mother, you must chaperon me. But don't you dare catch the crown! You're excused, Father, to talk with Mother Ingeborg. I know you'd lots rather.

THE COUNCILMAN [*gratefully*]: Thank you, my dear, I would.

MOTHER ANNA: But my dear Karin—

KARIN [*dragging her along*]: Oh, be a sport, Mother! Your dancing days aren't quite over!

MOTHER ANNA [*bridling*]: Not at all, my dear. Why should they be?

KARIN: Come along then. Strike up, Thorwald.

[*Thorwald glances at Hildur, who smiles slightly in assent. He plays the Varmland polska, and all dance around Hildur, three or four times, when she takes the crown from her head and flings it before her. Gudmund catches it, as if mechanically. There is a burst of laughter, the music stops suddenly, and Karin flies at him in mock fury. She snatches the crown from him and beats him with it.*]

KARIN: Beast! Numbskull! You'd take my chance from me, would you? A sweet, pretty bride, isn't he? [*She puts the crown on his head and they all shout at his foolish appearance.*]

GUDMUND [*humbly, removing the crown and handing it to her with a low bow*]: I'm very sorry, Karin.

KARIN [*severely*]: Don't you know that this is a ladies' game? You men are in the ring to fill up space—that's all. I'll do the catching.

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ERLAND [*apologetically*]: Gudmund was asleep, I believe.

GUDMUND: I believe I was. Try it again, Karin. I promise not to catch.

KARIN: We'll try it until *I* catch,—I warn you.

HILDUR [*pettishly*]: That's all very well for you; but I'd like to dance myself—and get this blindfold off my eyes. [She pulls impatiently at it. Karin springs to her in alarmed entreaty, straightens the blindfold, and places the crown upon her head.]

KARIN: Oh, Hildur dear, just till I catch once! Oh, please.

HILDUR [*reluctantly*]: Well, catch it quick, then.

KARIN [*hopefully*]: I'll wave my handkerchief toward you, and, when you smell heliotrope, you throw the crown. [All laugh.]

HILDUR [*stiffly*]: I shall play fair, if I play at all. [Music strikes up and they all circle about Hildur again. Karin waves her handkerchief violently as she comes in front of Hildur, Hildur flings the crown and Karin catches it. The music stops. Laughter and applause from the dancers.]

KARIN [*rapturously*]: I'm getting the knack. Just watch me pull it in tomorrow. [The Councilman's Wife sinks breathlessly into a chair. Erland stands beside her and fans her. Hildur starts to pull off her blindfold and Thorwald springs to loosen it for her. They consult together in low tones during the following speeches.]

MOTHER INGEBORG [*to Karin*]: Well done, my child. But tomorrow do not try to catch the crown. Your parents will not wish to lose a second daughter so soon.

KARIN [*confidentially*]: The fact is, Mother Ingeborg, I'm going to lock my hands tight behind me, if it

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comes my way tomorrow. But today doesn't count.
And everybody was so glum, I had to do something.

MOTHER INGEBORGB [laughing softly and patting Karin's hand]: We are all your debtors, little Karin.

[*Thorwald drawing a few sharp notes from his fiddle by way of attracting attention, strikes up the well known music for the dance called "Reaping Oats". Hildur beckons to Karin, who springs to her side, dragging the Councilman's wife with her.*]

KARIN [joyously]: Oh, we're going to reap the oats!
Come, boys! [*Erland, Gudmund and Hugo range themselves opposite the women.*]

GUDMUND: Hugo will lead us.

KARIN: Hildur for us. [*The two lines dance toward one another, interweave and separate, waving their arms with the motion of a sower, singing as they move. Each verse of the women is sung first by Hildur, then repeated by the three women in unison; each verse of the men, first by Hugo, then by the three men in unison.*]

WOMEN: Grow, grain, long as our flowing locks.

MEN: Sun warm the seed, rain swell it to bursting.

WOMEN: Leap from the ground, light as we leap in the dance.

Sway in the wind, free as our bodies, giving themselves to the music.

MEN: Gleam in the life-giving sun, darken in life-giving showers.

Give to us as freely as we give the seed to the earth.

[*The music changes and the dance imitates motions of cutting the grain with a long scythe and binding it into sheaves.*]

MEN: Deep stand we in waves of the yellow grain.

WOMEN: Swing we the long bright blades that shine in the sun.

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MEN: Hosts fall before us as proudly we advance.

WOMEN: Tenderly we lift the drooping grain and bind it.

[Again a change in the music, which becomes martial and triumphant. The dancers seem to beat out the grain with flails, then join hands and circle round and round in a dizzying whirl of exultation.]

WOMEN: Yield us the yellow grain, strength for our children.

MEN: Hold not a kernel back, for we have given all our strength to you.

MEN AND WOMEN together: Rich is our harvest, earth hath been bountiful. Full are our granaries, great our hearts with gladness. *[Music stops and there is a patter of applause from Mother Ingeborg and the Councilman.]*

MOTHER INGEBORG *[beaming with happiness]*: Thank you, my children. It was a kind thought to bring to me the games I cannot see tomorrow.

THE COUNCILMAN: We shall have all the old dances tomorrow, Mother Ingeborg. I insisted upon it. To be sure, the youngsters can't dance them as we did,—Nor sing them, either. But—

[There is a chorus of disgusted groans from the young people, in the midst of which Ingrid appears at the door.]

KARIN: All right, Father. Show us how, then. Do the weaving dance,—you and mother.

INGRID: Dinner is served.

KARIN: Oh bother. Well, after dinner then. Don't eat too much, Father, so you can't sing.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Eric Sigurdsson, will you wheel me to the table? *[The Councilman bows and takes his place behind her chair.]* Erland, give Mother Anna your arm. You young people may follow as you choose.

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[*Gudmund takes Hildur's arm and detains her a moment as the others, laughing and talking, go out.*]

GUDMUND: Just a minute, Hildur. I must speak to you.

HILDUR [*with tolerant kindness*]: What is it, Gudmund?

GUDMUND: You have got your way about Helga. She is going this afternoon. But it is against my will. I begged her to stay, but she would not, because she did not wish me to lose you.

HILDUR [*quite unmoved*]: Well?

GUDMUND [*passionately*]: But I *have* lost you. We do not feel the same about things. Do you think we can be happy together?

HILDUR [*surprised and a little piqued*]: What do you mean, Gudmund?

GUDMUND: Do you think we can? [*With sudden resolution.*] Perhaps,—perhaps it would be better if you did not give yourself to me tomorrow.

HILDUR [*startled*]: I don't know what you mean.

GUDMUND [*not looking at her*]: We are so far apart—

HILDUR [*sharply*]: What are you thinking of? Would you shame me tomorrow before all the countryside?

GUDMUND [*earnestly*]: How could I shame you, Hildur? I am not your equal in this marriage. There would be few to blame you if you should take back your promise.

HILDUR [*proudly*]: I am not one to take back promises.—But if you— [*Suddenly softening.*]—Has anything changed between us, Gudmund?

GUDMUND [*miserably*]: It seems to me that everything is changed.

HILDUR [*with growing tenderness*]: I have not changed. You said you had lost me. But this is not true.

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GUDMUND [*devouring her with his eyes*]: Isn't it true?

HILDUR: No, indeed, There is nothing to separate us, now that Helga has had the good sense to go away.

GUDMUND [*with a harsh laugh*]: Good sense! [More quietly.] Yes, that was it, no doubt.

HILDUR: Assuredly. She saw herself that it was not right for her to be here. And we can do much for her in her own home,—afterwards. Do not think me hard-hearted, Gudmund, or unkind.

GUDMUND [*looking at her dreamily*]: Surely you cannot be so, with that face. [Unconsciously he moves towards her.] Oh, Hildur—[She puts her hands against his breast and holds him at a little distance.]

HILDUR [*playfully*]: How is it, then, Gudmund? Shall I take back my promise to you? Or do you still want me to come to you tomorrow,—that you may—do with me—as you will— [She holds him with full gaze for an instant, then, on the last words drops her eyes and yields herself into his arms. Gudmund catches her hotly to his breast and kisses her hungrily.]

GUDMUND [*thickly*]: Hildur! Do you love me after all? Do you want to belong to me?

HILDUR [*gently disengaging herself from his arms*]: Of course I do, silly boy.—Why else should I—? But what will they think of us? [She glances toward the dining room.] Dinner will be waiting.

GUDMUND [*kissing her rapturously*]: Who wants dinner?

HILDUR [*pushing him from her with a playful but decisive movement.*]: That is enough now, Gudmund. They'll be sending someone for us. Come.

[They go out, arms entwined about each other. Gudmund stoops to kiss her again in the doorway as the curtain falls.]

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ACT II.

Scene 1.

Near midnight of the same day. The village tavern. A low room with heavy oak beams and scanty, rough furnishings. A rude bar runs along most of the back wall facing the audience. Kegs of beer and a few bottles of wine stand behind the bar. In the back wall left is the outer door. Door in left wall leads to other rooms of the tavern. A high Swiss clock points to ten minutes before twelve. Two or three heavy deal tables with chairs at them stand about the room. At the one furthest right and close to the front of the stage, sit Gudmund, Thorwald and Hugo, beer mugs and cards before them. One candle burns on this table. Olga stands behind the bar. She is of the large, blonde, impassive Swedish type, with slow-moving, wide blue eyes and a full, well moulded figure. The men drink incessantly during the scene.

GUDMUND: Fill the mugs, Olga, and we'll have one more game. Your deal, Hugo.

[*Hugo shuffles the cards unsteadily. Olga draws a great flagon of beer and moves in stately fashion toward the table, setting the flagon in the center after she has filled the mugs.*]

HUGO: All I shay is, it's too pointed—hic—not invitin' him to th' weddin'. Makesh talk—hic—

THORWALD: Talk! I should think it had!

GUDMUND: That's what I want. Talk's the only thing Martensson minds. He'd do any dirty thing in a corner; but people's whispering about it and pointing the finger at him is what he can't stand.

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THORWALD: You've made him the most unpopular fellow in Värmland, Gudmund.

HUGO: He mi' do you a mischief, ole chap. He's an ugly brute w'en you corner him.

GUDMUND: Let him, then. If he'd give me a chance, I'd stamp on him like a spider. When I think of the way he treated Helga—

HUGO [*sentimentally*]: Yesh, poor lil Helga—

THORWALD: Did Hildur and her mother object to leaving him out?

GUDMUND: No doubt they thought I was carrying things a bit too far; but they agreed. I said I wouldn't be there, if he was.

HUGO: Ha! ha! ha! ha! That shettled it, I should think. Haha.

THORWALD: Hildur agreed with you, I am sure, Gudmund, and admired you. She is one who must admire where she loves—I don't know whether I love you, or not—what is love between men?—but I too admire you.—And there's something else—trust, I think. That's it—I trust you, Gudmund.

HUGO [*snivelling*]: So do I—I trusht you, Gudmund. Who says I don't trusht you? We all trusht you. Hildur trushts you. Lil' Shelma trushts you. Her muzzer trushts—

GUDMUND: Oh don't mention it, ole chap. We'll take your word for it. Let's start something else.

THORWALD [*dreamily*]: At times like this—

GUDMUND: When you're about half-fuddled, do you mean?

THORWALD: I'm not fuddled—I'm clarified. Something—the stimulus of drink or of happy companionship—has sharpened and cleared my vision, till I seem to catch now and again faint, cloud-hung glimpses of—

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HUGO: Wha'sh he talkin' 'bout, Gu'mun'?

GUDMUND: Glimpses of what?

THORWALD [*dreamily*]: Of what—what the love of man for man really is.

GUDMUND: What is it, then?

THORWALD: It comes in flashes. I can't see it clearly. But I know that it is something fairer than the love of man for woman. It is of the spirit, not of the flesh, and so it will endure.

GUDMUND: Oh bosh! [*Drinks a long draught.*]

HUGO: Ha! ha! the shpirit, he shays—the shpirit in thish beer—thash what he meansh. [*Pounds on the table with his mug and laughs loudly.*]

GUDMUND: Shut up, Hugo. Go on, Thorwald.

THORWALD: I shall love many women, I suppose—many, because it is never a woman herself that I love but the spirit of beauty and of power that she wakens in me. I love the greater self that I become in her presence.

GUDMUND [*wonderingly*]: Izh that it? Then—

THORWALD: But does the passion to possess her enlarge me? No. The possessive instinct is small, dwarfing. I shrink to a lesser man when I try to seize upon something, appropriate it to myself. I expand only as I rejoice in its limitless beauty, absorb myself in its infinite calm and goodness.—

HUGO [*drunkenly, pounding the table*]: Hear! Hear! Good ole Thorwald.

[*While Thorwald is speaking the outer door opens and the Swiss pedlar shuffles in. He is dressed in European costume, a nondescript and dirty combination of brown trousers, gray coat and black waistcoat, with a visored, shapeless cap on his head, a huge pack on his shoulders.*]

PEDLAR [*at the door*]: Goot efening, all. [No one answers, and with no sign of expecting this courtesy, he

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sets his pack in the corner behind the door, and cap in hand, bowing incessantly, advances to the bar.]

PEDLAR: A mug of stout, if you please, my tear.
[*Olga pours him the stout.*]

GUDMUND: Go on, Thorwald. Thish izh our—hic—party. Don' min' the—hic—greasy Outlander—hic—

THORWALD [*peevishly*]: The scarecrow has frightened away all my darting, wheeling thoughts.

HUGO [*belligerently*]: Who zat, Olga? Sen' 'im away. I don' want 'im here.

GUDMUND: More beer, Olga,—hic— [*She fills the mugs and the flagon.*]

THORWALD: See that you wash the mug well, Olga, after that fellow has drunk from it.

HUGO: Give him—hic—the shpittoon. [*He kicks it toward her and slides off his chair, recovering himself with some difficulty.*]

OLGA [*with a contemptuous glance at the pedlar*]: One must serve them all.

GUDMUND [*hilariously*]: But not all alike, Olga, my girl. We've notished that—hic—

[*Sings*] To shweeten Carl's glash with a kish
She thought it wash nussin' amissh—
But when Larsh craved the shame
She called a new game—hic—
And poured his good beer
Down hish ear—hic— Ha! ha! ha!

[*Thorwald and Hugo join in his laughter.*]

HUGO [*pulling Olga down to him*]: A kish for lil Hugo, pleash. [*He kisses her and she cuffs his ears perfunctorily*]

OLGA: Let me alone. You'd best go home now. Your legs won't carry you if you drink any more.

GUDMUND: We'll shee him home. My legsh are shteady. Shee—[*He executes a few shuffling dance steps*]

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and sits down suddenly on the floor.] Ha! ha! Thorwald,
ole boy, mus' take us bosh home, Hugo'n me.

HUGO: Less shtay here, aw'night. W'y not? On
th' floor. [He looks vacantly at the floor and settles down
in his chair in a drunken stupor.]

GUDMUND [rising from the floor and reseating himself
clumsily in his chair]: Olga! Give—hic—dthat dam'
Outlander—hic—a flagonful on my 'count an' then—
hic—turn—'im out. We want—hic—th' plasch to our-
shelves—hic—. [Olga goes behind bar.]

PEDLAR [bowing very low to Gudmund]: T'ank you a
t'ousant time, your honor. [To Olga.] Gif me the
flagon. I vill serf myself at that dable. [He indicates
the table next Gudmund's.]

GUDMUND [belligerently]: Not that table—hic—
Keep your distansh, Ishaac. I can shmeell you—hic—
from here—hic.

[Per Martensson enters in time to hear Gudmund's last
two speeches. He pauses at the door long enough to ex-
change a glance of secret understanding with Olga, then
moves toward the bar.]

PEDLAR: Very well, Meester, I vill dake dhis dable,
den. [Moving to one in the corner nearest the door and
sitting at it.] It is all vun to me.

[As Per Martensson passes near Gudmund's table, he
nods curtly to the three friends. Gudmund and Thorwald
stare at him with hostile expressions, not acknowledging his
salutation. Hugo, however, opens his eyes, gazes at him
stupidly for an instant and then bursts into exuberant
drunken greetings, half rising from his chair.]

HUGO: Well, if it isn't Per Martenshon! Good ole
boy! Come an' have a—hic—dhrink—hic—with ush.
We're dhrinking the ole year out—hic—yeh know.—

THORWALD: Shut up, Hugo.

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GUDMUND [*pulling him down into his chair*]: Si' down. You're drunk.

HUGO [*with outraged virtue*]: Coursh I'm drunk—hic—I'm dhrinking th' ole year—hic—out.

GUDMUND: Keep still.

HUGO: Keep still, yerself—hic—I'm tellin' Per, Gudmun's gettin' married t'morrah, Per,—poor ole boy.—Sho we're drinkin' th' ole—I mean th' new year in. Thass it. Si' down, Per. Get chair for ole Per, Thorwal'. All frien's here. [*While Hugo talks, Martensson stands by the table, surveying the group with a malicious smile. He lights a cigarette and puffs nonchalantly at it, waiting to see what Gudmund will do.*]

GUDMUND: Si' down yourself. [*He pushes Hugo into his chair with no gentle hand.*] That fellow shall never drink at my table. I'd ask Ishaac here first.—hic—Come, Ishaac,—hic—bring your bottle. You may not be honest, but you're decent—hic—for all I know. Come along. [*He rises unsteadily and pulls the pedlar by the arm to the larger table, drags up a chair and pushes him into it. The pedlar holds fast to his flagon. Martensson, with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders, moves to the bar and stands, leaning over it, blowing smoke from his cigarette into Olga's neck and bosom. She pretends to resent this but is evidently flattered and pleased.*]

PEDLAR [*bowing low to the three friends*]: Tanks, your honors. I vill, mit mooch playsure, make vun in your liddle pardy. [*Hugo's head gradually sinks down on the table and he seems to have fallen asleep. Gudmund pours drinks all around and drains his mug.*]

MARTENSSON: A glass of cordial, please— [*Olga pours and he drinks, leaning over the bar. Setting down his glass, he fondles Olga's arm, slipping his hand up her sleeve, and saying something to her in a low tone, which*

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makes her look at Gudmund, apparently fearful lest he has heard. Martensson jerks his head contemptuously in Gudmund's direction and laughs harshly.]

THORWALD [disgustedly]: But Gudmund, why should you ask him? [Jerking his thumb toward the pedlar.]

GUDMUND [boisterously, with evident intention to be heard by Martensson.]: His shtench ish better—hic—than the othersh—hic.

THORWALD [seeing that Martensson has heard this]: Keep shtill, Gudmun', can't you? You talk too much. [Gudmund gathers up the cards and begins to shuffle them, not looking at Martensson.]

GUDMUND [loudly]: More beer, Olga. [Olga starts to fetch it, but Martensson holds her by the arm, looking up into her face with a cool, calculating, provocative smile.]

THORWALD: Less take Hugo home.

GUDMUND [calls]: Give us shome beer, I shay—quick. We're goin' home. Thish comp'ny here—hic—ish not to our tashte.

MARTENSSON [again detaining Olga and speaking in a smooth, cutting voice]: Another glass of cordial, Olga. [Olga mechanically pours it out and offers it to him. Still holding Olga's arm, he raises the glass as if drinking her health, then turns and surveys Gudmund with insolent satisfaction.]

MARTENSSON: When I am quite done with Olga, you can have her. It won't be the first time you've taken my leavings.

GUDMUND [stupidly]: Wha'sh that?

THORWALD [sharply, after a pause]: Look oud! Are you shpeakin' of—of Gudmund's bride?

MARTENSSON [smoothly, with a mocking smile]: By no means. Do not excite yourself unnecessarily, Thorwald Larsson.

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

GUDMUND [vacantly]: Hildur? Leavingsh? What! [He leaps from his chair, steadyng himself with his hands on the table. His voice clears, and the drunken stupor seems to slip off him like a garment.] Is it Helga you mean? You—you dirty liar! [He hurls himself at Martensson in one agile spring.]

THORWALD [jumping in between them]: Stop! Stop! Hugo—Isaac, pull him off!

HUGO [waking, partly]: Wha—wha's the madder? [He lurches toward the group and apparently without much consciousness of what he is doing, helps the pedlar pull Gudmund from behind.]

PEDLAR: In Gott's name, sir— [Gudmund has Martensson down, but Thorwald and the pedlar pull him off and draw him away to a safe distance. During the next two speeches Olga goes to Martensson, helps him to rise and dusts off his clothing.]

GUDMUND [trying to pull loose from Thorwald and the pedlar]: Let me alone, can't you?

THORWALD: Don't be a fool. You can't get married, if you kill him—

PEDLAR: Or if he should kill you, young sir— See—he has a knife! [Martensson has pulled a clasp knife from his pocket, opened it, and, as Gudmund speaks, lunges toward him, knife in hand.]

GUDMUND: Killing's too good for such a swine! [He makes for Martensson again, but is stopped by Thorwald and the pedlar, while Olga catches Martensson's arm and steps between the two men.]

OLGA: You must go outside, gentlemen, if you're for breaking the peace. The master is a constable now, and he will have a quiet house.

THORWALD [to Martensson, holding Gudmund back]:

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Get out, quick. And you'd best hold your tongue, after this.

GUDMUND [*advancing upon Martensson menacingly*]: Say it was a dirty lie, you cur, or I'll finish you now. [*Martensson hesitates*.]

THORWALD [*warningly, still holding Gudmund*]: Say it, and get out. He means business.

HUGO: Yesh, he meansh bushinesh.

MARTENSSON [*blackly*]: So do I— [*Gudmund makes a spring at him and catches him by the throat. His knife falls to the floor.*]

THORWALD: Quick, Hugo. [*Hugo and Thorwald pull Gudmund off until he turns savagely upon them. They hold him firmly while the pedlar picks up the knife.*]

THORWALD [*to Martensson*]: Have you had enough? Say what he wants or he'll murder you.

GUDMUND: Say you lied, you dirty scoundrel.

MARTENSSON [*sullenly, after a pause*]: If he denies it, of course I accept [*sneeringly*] the word of a gentleman. [*Gudmund starts as if to lay hands on him again, but Thorwald and Hugo restrain him.*]

THORWALD: That's enough from him. Let him go, Gudmund.

[*The pedlar returns his knife to Martensson with a low bow and Martensson slinks toward the door.*]

GUDMUND [*thickly*]: But our account isn't settled yet—remember that.

MARTENSSON [*in the doorway*]: No. It is not settled yet.

[*EXIT Martensson. Gudmund reseats himself at the table and the others follow his example.*]

OLGA: It is time to close, gentlemen. [*She indicates the clock.*]

GUDMUND: After one more drink, Olga. I must wash the taste of that carrion out of my mouth. Faugh!

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[*He spits and drinks the remainder of his mug, holding it out for more.*]

THORWALD: You've had enough, Gudmund, and so have we.—

GUDMUND [*obstinately*]: One more, old chap. Then we'll go home. My head is clear as sunrise now.

OLGA [*bringing another flagon of beer, fills mugs and sets flagon on table. She gathers up all the candles except that on Gudmund's table and blows them out.*] I'll leave you one candle. Good night, gentlemen.

ALL IN CHORUS: Goo' night, Olga.

[*EXIT Olga.*]

PEDLAR [*rising as door closes behind her*]: Gen'lemen, I gif you Olga—the mos' peautiful mait oussite of Swisserlant. [*He raises his mug, and Gudmund and Thorwald raising their mugs drink.*]

GUDMUND } [drinking]: Olga! [The outside door opens
THORWALD } softly and Martensson slips in, unob-
HUGO } served by anyone on the stage. He drops
on his hands and knees and crawls to the
nearest table, concealing himself beneath
it].

GUDMUND [*aggressively*]: See here, Isaac, I've seen your Swiss girls—they're not so much.

PEDLAR [*raising his hands to heaven*]: Gott im Himmel! The Swiss maitens are the mos' peautiful in all the worldt. This is by all men known—

THORWALD } : Ha! ha! ha! ha! [Hugo slides down in his
GUDMUND } chair again and lays his head on the table.]

PEDLAR [*excitedly*]: As far as Swisserlant is the mos' peautiful of lants, so are her maitens the mos' peautiful of maitens. I gif you Swisserlant,—mit her mountains so vite, mit her fir trees so plack, mit—[his voice has risen to a drunken, oratorical, sing-song.]

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THORWALD: Oh, shut up, Ishaac. Go back to Shwitzerland, if you want to—hic— Don't let ush keep you.

[*Thorwald and Gudmund laugh boisterously, winking at each other.*]

THORWALD [*shaking Hugo by the shoulder*]: Wake up, Hugo. We're going home. [Hugo does not stir.]

PEDLAR [*knowingly*]: I can vake the shentleman— So— [*He dashes the contents of his mug into Hugo's face. Hugo starts and splutters, opening his eyes wonderingly.*]

GUDMUND [*springing to his feet*]: You stinking Outlander! Here, Thorwald, put him out! [Gudmund seizes one of the pedlar's arms, Thorwald a leg, throwing him down. They both shake Hugo, and pull him from his chair.]

PEDLAR [*struggling*]: But, shentlemen, vait a minute.

THORWALD: Take his other leg, Hugo. [Hugo stupidly obeys.]

GUDMUND: Now, heave him out.

[As they move toward the door in a lurching, swaying mass, the pedlar struggling to free himself, the three friends hardly able to keep their feet, Martensson slips noiselessly out from under the table. When the group is half way to the door, he seizes upon and extinguishes the one candle. There are startled exclamations from Gudmund and Thorwald, a rush across the floor, the sound of a body precipitating itself upon the four men, a scuffling thud as the mass of intertwined men fall, "Mein Gott" in the pedlar's voice, breaking into a hoarse scream which is suddenly checked, a few faint, choking groans, then the sound of someone scrambling to his feet, the scrape of the outer door opening and running footsteps outside. Meanwhile—]

GUDMUND [*in a stupid, dazed voice*]: Is—is anybody hurt?

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THORWALD: What's up? Where's the candle?

GUDMUND: Hugo, where are you? Hugo!—

THORWALD: Here, I've got a match. [Strikes it, showing a huddle of two dark figures on the floor. Gudmund strikes another match, finds a candle and lights it, as the door in the left wall is thrown violently open and the Constable walks in, lantern in hand.]

CONSTABLE [Gruffly, swinging his lantern in all directions]: What's this? What's this? Who's disturbing the peace in my house?

GUDMUND: Bring your light here. I'm afraid somebody's hurt.

CONSTABLE [bringing light]: Hurt? If there's mischief done, some of you shall smart for it. Who's here? [peering into his face] Gudmund Erlandsson, as I'm a sinner! And Thorwald Larsson! And—

THORWALD [pulling Hugo out from under the pedlar]: Wake up, old man. [Shakes him gently.]

CONSTABLE: Hugo Anderson, too! Young gentlemen, I'm the guardian of the law, and if there's been mischief done here—

GUDMUND [kneeling by Hugo, who is beginning to open his eyes]: You're all right, aren't you, old boy?

HUGO [stupidly]: Aw' ri'. 'Course, I'm aw' ri'. [They assist him to rise and he stands staring round-eyed at the pedlar, who still lies on the floor.]

CONSTABLE: And who's this? [Bending over the pedlar.]

GUDMUND: The pedlar. Is he hurt?

CONSTABLE [setting down his lantern and putting his ear to the man's heart]: He's dead.

GUDMUND }
THORWALD } : Dead?

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CONSTABLE: Look at this! A knife in him. Blade broken off— He's done for.

HUGO: He's dead?

GUDMUND: A knife?

THORWALD: Why, why—how could—?

CONSTABLE [*sternly, withdrawing from the dazed group about the pedlar*]: That is what we must find out. [*Raising his hand authoritatively.*] Gentlemen, you are under arrest.

CURTAIN

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

ACT II.

Scene 2.

Same as Act I.—the living room at Narlunda, as in Act I., but trimmed with garlands of young birch leaves. Early the next morning. Mother Ingeborg in her wheel-chair is discovered sitting by the fireplace, and Erland reading a newspaper by the table, which is spread for breakfast.

ERLAND [*throwing down his newspaper*]: Well, my dear, I want my breakfast.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Go and see if Gudmund is not ready. I can't bear to sit down without Gudmund.

ERLAND [*looking hungrily at the table*]: I can. But he'd better sleep as long as he will. He must have come in very late last night.

MOTHER INGEBORG: I didn't hear him at all.

ERLAND: Nor I. Sometime after midnight, I heard wheels on the road and looked out, but it was that fellow Martensson. Then I went sound asleep till morning.

MOTHER INGEBORG: I wish he would come. It is our last meal with him before—

ERLAND: But I expect to have several with him—*after*.

MOTHER INGEBORG: It will not be the same when he is married, Erland. You know that very well. Now he is here with us just as he has been for twenty-two years. Tomorrow there will be Hildur.

ERLAND [*densely*]: But you want Hildur to be here, don't you? Was it not your idea in the first place,—this marriage?

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MOTHER INGEBORG: Of course I want her here. She is just the wife for Gudmund. I have always said so. But I never would have urged him to marry her,—for all her money,—if he hadn't been in love with her.

ERLAND: Well, he *is* in love with her. So why are you faint-hearted now?—when your victorious army is just marching into the city?

MOTHER INGEBORG: Nonsense, Erland. It's not *my* army. And I'm not faint-hearted, exactly. Only it is a great change for her. And suppose she shouldn't like being a farmer's wife, after all?

ERLAND [*cheerfully*]: Well then, I suppose she won't like it. But no doubt she's fond of Gudmund, and they'll manage to worry through somehow, as others have before them.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Have we worried through, Erland? Is that what you'd call it?

ERLAND: Well, my dear, there have been some—some adjustments. I've made most of them, but no doubt you've made a few yourself!

MOTHER INGEBORG: A few!— Well, if he's as happy as we've been,— Go and knock at the door, Erland. Tell him to dress quickly.

[*Gudmund is seen approaching through the garden with the Constable.*]

ERLAND [*rising and seeing Gudmund*]: Why, there he is. [Mother Ingeborg looks toward the garden.]

MOTHER INGEBORG: Has he been out already? Who is it with him?

ERLAND: The Constable. [Enter Gudmund with the Constable.]

CONSTABLE: Good morning, friends

MOTHER INGEBORG: Good morning, Lars Jansson. Gudmund, where have you been? What has happened?

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GUDMUND [*going over and kissing her*]: Don't be frightened, mother. I'm arrested, but—

MOTHER INGEBORG [*with a stifled shriek*]: Arrested?

GUDMUND [*putting his hand on her shoulder soothingly*]: Yes, but it's a mistake. Only on this particular morning, you see, it's awkward.

ERLAND [*stepping forward and facing Gudmund*]: Tell us, Gudmund, what have you done?

GUDMUND: You see, I don't know. That's the difficulty.

ERLAND: You don't know?

CONSTABLE: The young gentlemen were very drunk.

GUDMUND: We'd been drinking all the evening—Thorwald, Hugo and I—at the Blue Hen, you know. And a pedlar came in—one of those Swiss fellows—and maybe we got too rough with him, I don't know. Anyhow, he's dead, with the blade of somebody's pocket-knife in his skull. [*Erland utters a stifled exclamation. Mother Ingeborg looks at Gudmund with incredulous horror in her eyes.*]]

MOTHER INGEBORG: Oh, Gudmund, but it was not you. It could not be. You never hurt a grasshopper in all your life!

CONSTABLE [*shaking his head sagely*]: Many a murder has been done without intention.

ERLAND: Is that all the comfort you have for us, Lars Jansson?

CONSTABLE: It is best to look first on the dark side of things, Erland Erlandsson. Because then, if all things turn out well, you have a pleasant surprise. If not—you are prepared for the worst. [*He wags his head knowingly and looks around the circle for admiration; but Gudmund is kneeling beside his mother with his arms around her body, which is shaking with silent sobs.*]

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Erland, gazing at them, hardly hears what the Constable is saying.]

GUDMUND [*in a choking voice*]: Don't, Mother dear. We must think what can be done.

MOTHER INGEBORG: How can anyone think you did it?

GUDMUND: I wouldn't believe it *was* done at all, if I hadn't seen the knife in him. I *couldn't* have done it. Why, I wouldn't know how.

CONSTABLE: We must detain all the young gentlemen, until they can clear themselves. Very sorry. Especially today.

GUDMUND: It's all a delirium. How can we ever know?

ERLAND: You did not do it, my son. We may be sure of that. But to prove it— [*He breaks off with a despairing gesture.*]

CONSTABLE [*judicially*]: The knife blade is the only clue, so far.

ERLAND [*impatiently*]: Well?

GUDMUND: That doesn't seem to help much either. Hugo's knife has a broken blade, but it does not fit the one in the pedlar's skull. Thorwald's knife has no broken blade. And my knife—is missing. [*Erland groans involuntarily and drops his head.*]

CONSTABLE: Don't give up hope, Erland Erlandsson. I have seen men saved who were nearer the gallows than he. [*Gudmund winces at the word and Mother Ingeborg raises her bowed head proudly.*]

MOTHER INGEBORG: Do not say such things, Lars Jansson. Gudmund is innocent and no harm can come to him.

ERLAND: But what did you do with your knife? You always carry it.

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GUDMUND: Yes, in this pocket. But it is not there.

ERLAND: Can't you remember what you did with it?

GUDMUND: No. Of course it looks as if I had got rid of it after sticking the Outlander. But I was too drunk to go out of the room, I'm sure.

CONSTABLE: It is nowhere on my premises,—I have made thorough search, since daylight.

MOTHER INGEBORG: But the wedding! Hildur! What shall we do about—

ERLAND: They may have started already. I'll go and meet them.

GUDMUND: Why should you do that? Do you want to stop the wedding?

ERLAND [amazed]: Why—can the wedding go on, now? [Looks at Constable.]

CONSTABLE: If you will sign this bond for your son, [producing a legal document from his pocket] he can remain at liberty till six o'clock this evening. He seems to think it important.

ERLAND: Would you marry Hildur before—

GUDMUND [squaring his shoulders]: I am innocent. Why should I not marry Hildur? When you have signed this bond, the Constable will leave me and come for me at Alväkra at six o'clock tonight. Hildur need not know till then.

MOTHER INGEBORG: You would not tell her till after the wedding?

GUDMUND: I would not. Why should I shame her before all the countryside? If I had killed the man, it would be different; but I am innocent and this will be proved.

ERLAND: Yes. You are innocent; but until you are proved so— However, you can decide this when I have

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signed the bond. Let me have it, if you please. [Turns to the Constable and takes the bond from him.]

CONSTABLE: Sign here, if you please, Erland Erlands-son.

ERLAND: Very well. [Sits at the table and reads the bond.]

CONSTABLE: We must have two witnesses—not mem-bers of the family. I will be one and one of the servants will do for the other.

GUDMUND: Here is Helga, I'd rather ask her. [Helga is seen approaching through the garden. Gudmund opens the door to her.] Good morning, Helga. What brings you here so early?

HELGA: Good morning, Gudmund. I have come to wish you happiness on your wedding day. Good morn-ing, Mother Ingeborg and Father Erland.

MOTHER INGEBORG }
ERLAND } : Good morning, Helga.

HELGA: I had to go to market with the peat, so I came to wish Gudmund happiness. [She smiles frankly at him. Gudmund chokes and turns away.]

MOTHER INGEBORG: Thank you, my child. He will need your good wishes today.

HELGA: Why, what is the matter? Is something wrong, Gudmund?

GUDMUND: It is better now, Helga, since you have come. Something hard in me broke when you wished me happiness— Why are you so kind? You ought rather to be angry with me for making it impossible that you should remain here.

HELGA: Why no, Gudmund. Surely you were not to blame. But tell me what has happened. Why are you not dressed?

GUDMUND: You shall hear, Helga. But first, will

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you be a witness to this bond that my father signs for me?

HELGA: Certainly I will.

CONSTABLE: As soon as Erland Erlandsson has signed, you must write your name. [Erland signs and motions Helga to take his chair at the table. Helga sits. The Constable, points to a line on the paper]: Here. [Helga signs her name, the Constable signs his, puts the bond in his pocket and moves toward the door. Mother Ingeborg sits bowed in her chair, her face hidden in her hands, weeping silently. Helga kneels beside her chair and puts both arms around her.] Good morning to you. At Alvakra at six tonight.

GUDMUND: I will be ready. Good morning. [Exit Constable.] Father, I have changed my mind. [Mother Ingeborg and Helga look up. Helga rises and stands with clasped hands, looking steadily at Gudmund.] I must tell Hildur, before the wedding. It would be unjust to drag her into my misfortune. I must have been mad to think of it.

ERLAND: Good. And I may as well tell you now, my son, that I should have told the Councilman, if you had not. The Alväkra folk are jealous of their honor, and I could not have stood silently by while Hildur married a man under accusation of murder.

HELGA [clasping her hands together in dismay]: Murder?

GUDMUND: I have not killed anyone, Helga.

MOTHER INGEBORG: That he has not.

GUDMUND: But—is it too late to see Hildur before she leaves Alväkra?

MOTHER INGEBORG: They must already have started.

ERLAND: It will soon be over, Gudmund. I believe

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that the Councilman will understand what it costs you to do the right thing and they will all be kind.

GUDMUND: It does not matter.

ERLAND: I have heard something of this sort before.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Not like this, surely.

ERLAND: Yes— There was a bridegroom once who happened to shoot a comrade to death during a hunt. It was not discovered that he was the one who had fired the fatal shot; but he went to the bride and said, "This marriage cannot take place. I do not wish to drag you into the misery that awaits me."

HELGA: This is what Gudmund will say.

ERLAND: And the bride took him by the hand and led him into the drawing room where all the guests were assembled for the ceremony. There she related in a clear voice what the bridegroom had just said to her. "I have told of this," she said, "that all may know you have practised no deceit upon me. Now I want to be married to you at once. You are what you are, even though you have met with misfortune; and whatever awaits you, I want to share it equally with you."

HELGA [*flashing at Gudmund a radiant smile of friendly confidence*]: That is just what Hildur will do!

GUDMUND [*shrugging his shoulders incredulously*]: It will not end so for us.

ERLAND: Who knows? [*The wedding party approaches, Hildur wearing her bridal gown, veil and crown; the Councilman, the Councilman's wife, and Karin, in resplendent costumes, closely following. Gudmund opens the door for them. Helga slips quietly over to the fireplace and stands there unobserved by the newcomers.*]

GUDMUND: Good morning, Hildur. I bid you welcome all.

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HILDUR: Good morning, Gudmund. Why, you are not dressed!

ERLAND: Welcome, honored guests.

MOTHER INGEBORG: Good morning, my friends.

THE COUNCILMAN } : Good morning, good
THE COUNCILMAN'S WIFE } morning all.

KARIN [with a flourish]: Way for the bride! She does me credit, doesn't she? [She looks around the circle for admiration.]

THE COUNCILMAN'S WIFE: But how is this? Gudmund not dressed yet?

KARIN: Shame upon him! If I were you, Hildur, I'd take one of the others in his place.

THE COUNCILMAN: Is anything wrong?

ERLAND: My son has something to tell you.

GUDMUND [as though he were repeating a lesson]: I was at the Blue Hen last night, drinking out my last night as a bachelor with Thorwald Larsson and Hugo Andersson. And a man was killed—

THE COUNCILMAN [sharply]: What? Who killed him?

GUDMUND: No one knows. We were all too drunk. But there is a broken knife blade in his skull that will tell. And my knife is missing. [Helga, who has been listening attentively, starts and makes as if to rush toward the group, then checks herself, clasps her hands together and looks with joyous expectancy toward Hildur.]

KARIN: But, Gudmund! That's simply absurd!

[The Councilman and his wife glare at Gudmund with furious anger. Gudmund looks steadily at Hildur, who stands motionless with her eyes on the ground. As if unconsciously she pulls out one of the large pins which holds her crown in place and lifts her hand as if to remove it.]

GUDMUND: So I must go to prison, until the case is judged. [Seeing Hildur's action, he stops speaking; she

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looks up at him, and in confusion puts the pin back in place.]

THE COUNCILMAN'S WIFE: Upon my word! This is what comes of such a connection!

THE COUNCILMAN: A wretched business, indeed. But it is well that we have not been dragged into it.

KARIN [*almost sobbing*]: Don't let them talk so, Hildur.

HILDUR [*looking at her with cold steadiness*]: One can easily see that you are not concerned in this, Karin.

ERLAND: It is not proved that Gudmund was the slayer; but I can well understand that you would wish the wedding postponed, until he has been cleared of the charge.

THE COUNCILMAN: It is not worth while to talk of postponement. It is better to decide now that all is over between him and Hildur.

KARIN: No, Father!

THE COUNCILMAN'S WIFE: Certainly! That is the only thing to do now. But what a dreadful disgrace. Oh, my poor child! Come, let us go at once.

GUDMUND [*going over to Hildur and extending his hand*]: Won't you say farewell to me, Hildur?

HILDUR [*staring coldly at him*]: Was it with that hand you guided the knife?

GUDMUND [*turning to the Councilman*]: You are quite right. It is useless to talk of a wedding. [To Erland.] Now I will go back to the prison and give myself up. [*Puts on his hat and exit by the garden.*]

THE COUNCILMAN'S WIFE: Come, Hildur, let us go. Good morning, Anna Olafsdotter, and Erland Erlands-son. [They all bow ceremoniously, the Councilman opens the garden door and they start to go out, when Helga moves impetuously toward Hildur.]

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HELGA [*breathlessly*]: May I speak with you, Hildur Ericsdotter? It is a matter of great importance.

THE COUNCILMAN'S WIFE: Do not keep us waiting, Hildur. This girl can have nothing to say to you.

HELGA [*clasping her hands in entreaty*]: Oh, do let me speak with you, alone, only for a moment. You will not be sorry.

HILDUR [*surveying her coldly*]: Very well. I will join you at the carriage, Mother. [*The Councilman and his wife go out slowly, pausing several times to look back and shake their heads together. Karin follows them with drooping aspect, as if ashamed.*]

MOTHER INGEBORG: Wheel me to my room, Erland. [*Exeunt, while Helga waits, looking anxiously at Hildur. Before the door is fully closed, she begins to speak, going close to Hildur and looking earnestly in her face.*]

HELGA: Before I speak, I must know one thing—do you love Gudmund?

HILDUR [*wincing slightly*]: Why else do you suppose I ever wished to marry him?

HELGA: I mean, do you still love him?

HILDUR [*slowly*]: I think, perhaps, I have never loved him so much as today.

HELGA [*clapping her hands in childish joy*]: Oh then, run quickly, dear Hildur. He cannot have gone far. If you call to him, he will stop.

HILDUR [*drawing back from her*]: Why should I do that?

HELGA [*drawing her impulsively toward the door*]: Don't wait,—not a moment,—or he will be out of call.

HILDUR [*resisting her*]: What do you mean?

HELGA [*eagerly*]: If you tell him, now, that you love him more than ever, and that you will wait for him while he is in prison,—

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HILDUR: But that is impossible. I don't wish to marry someone who has been in prison.

HELGA [*staggering back, as if Hildur had struck her*]: But I don't understand. Surely if you love him—And besides, he is innocent.

HILDUR: Do you know this for certain, or is it only something that you believe to be true?

HELGA: I know it for certain. When he spoke about the knife, I could see at once—

HILDUR: The knife?

HELGA: It was not the blade of Gudmund's knife that killed the pedlar—

HILDUR: How do you know?

HELGA [*takes from her pocket Gudmund's knife which she shows to Hildur*]: This is Gudmund's knife.

HILDUR: Yes, I know it well.

HELGA: It has been in my pocket since yesterday morning. Gudmund lent it to me to cut the wild apple boughs which I strewed in the drive before you. And I left Närlunda without giving it back, so he did not have it in his pocket last night.

HILDUR: Then he is innocent, after all!

HELGA: Did you not know it, before this?

HILDUR: No, Helga, I was not sure.

HELGA [*proudly*]: Gudmund is no murderer.

HILDUR [*looking keenly at Helga*]: Have you told anyone of this?

HELGA: No. It is only now that I learned it. I shall go straight to the Judge and he will release Gudmund. But first you must speak with him,—oh do, dear Hildur! that all may be well between you two.

HILDUR: First? Before he knows that you can prove him innocent?

HELGA: Yes, indeed! You must never let him know

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I have spoken to you; else he cannot forgive you for what happened just now.

HILDUR: I was very angry with him, because he had brought me into disgrace. But no doubt I was too hasty.

HELGA: Then come, at once, Hildur. Your father's carriage will soon overtake him.

HILDUR: But there is much in all this that I do not understand. Do you know that it was I who wanted you to leave Närlunda?

HELGA [*simply*]: I knew, of course, that it was not the folk at Närlunda who wished me away.

HILDUR: I can't comprehend that you should come to me today with the desire to help me.

HELGA: Gudmund has been very kind to me. I want him to be happy.

HILDUR [*after a pause, looking keenly at Helga*]: Why did you keep Gudmund's knife?

HELGA [*confused*]: I—there was so little time before I left Närlunda and I was much distressed—

HILDUR [*with quiet persistence*]: Did you forget it?

HELGA: No, that was not the reason. I wanted to keep it just for a few hours. I had nothing else which belonged to him.

HILDUR: I see.

HELGA: Yes. You see, Hildur. And I am not ashamed that you should see. Nobody can help loving Gudmund. He is so generous and good.

HILDUR: But why, then, are you trying to make it up between us?

HELGA [*sharply*]: What could I be to him? You know very well, Hildur, that I am only a poor Croft girl, and that's not the worst about me. He's as far above me as Mount Otterhällen is above our marsh.

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HILDUR: Well, I will go speak with Gudmund. But we shall not overtake him now.

HELGA: Will your parents let me ride to the town with them, Hildur?

HILDUR: I will tell my father to take you whenever you wish.

HELGA: I will go to the Courthouse, or to the Judge's house, if the Court is not sitting now. And he will let Gudmund go home at once. If you wait by the Crossroads, till he goes by, you can't miss him.

HILDUR: At the Crossroads? In my wedding clothes?

HELGA: Leave the crown and the veil here. Then they will be ready for the wedding when you return. Your mother has on a dark cloak, hasn't she?

HILDUR: Yes. [She removes crown and veil and lays them on the table.]

HELGA: Slip it over this dress and no one will notice. Oh, come, let us go at once, to set Gudmund free. [She pulls Hildur toward the door.]

CURTAIN.

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

ACT III.

Scene 1.

The Courtroom, arranged as in the Prologue, but with no spectators present. Time, one-half hour later than the end of Act II. The Judge is discovered sitting at the table with papers spread before him. Helga stands in front of the table and the Constable at one side of it. Both men lean toward Helga in attitudes of absorbed attention.

JUDGE: This is very important, Helga. Will you swear in court to what you have just told me?

HELGA: Indeed I will.

JUDGE [*to Constable*]: Bring Gudmund Erlandsson here at once. [*Exit Constable.—To Helga.*] It is well that you are the one to tell me this. If it were some other person I should wish first to make sure that his knife is really Gudmund's and that it has been in your possession since yesterday morning; but I know that one may believe what you will say.

HELGA: You may believe this, your Honor,

JUDGE: Have you told anyone else about the knife?

HELGA: Only Hildur Ericsdotter, Gudmund's betrothed. She is waiting for him now at the Crossroads.

JUDGE: Then Gudmund does not know that his knife was in your possession last night?

HELGA: He must have forgotten, or he would have spoken of it. [*Door opens.*]

JUDGE: Well, we will see if he cannot remember.

[*Enter Gudmund with Constable. He looks as if he had made a toilet, but still wears his torn suit of clothes. He*

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bows gravely to the Judge, and then with some surprise, to Helga.] You have a friend here, you see. [Door again opens and Erland enters. There is an elation in his face and bearing which he cannot conceal.] And here is Erland Erlandsson. What can I do for you, my friend? [Erland bows low to the Judge and glances at Gudmund and Helga.]

ERLAND: I have a piece of evidence to lay before you in this case, your Honor.

JUDGE: I will hear it in a moment. But first let us finish the business in hand. *[To Constable]: Take note of what is said. [Constable bows—To Gudmund.] Tell me, Gudmund, do you not know where your pocket knife is?*

GUDMUND *[looks troubled and slightly shakes his head]: When my head stops aching I can probably remember. But I thought it was in my pocket. I always carry it there.*

JUDGE: Have you no better knife than you sometimes carry?

GUDMUND: No. Only this one. It was given to me by my father when I was twelve years old. I have always used it since.

JUDGE: Describe it to me.

GUDMUND: It has one large blade and one small one, and a horn handle with a silver plate on it.

JUDGE: Is the plate marked?

GUDMUND: Yes, by my initials, G. E.

JUDGE *[corroboratively]: When did you use it last?*

GUDMUND: Shaving kindlings, I think, yesterday morning—I can't remember having it since.

JUDGE: Did anyone else use it afterwards?

GUDMUND *[after a pause, starts and looks at Helga]. Why yes, of course. Helga borrowed it of me to cut apple blossoms. How stupid of me to forget that! You*

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remember, don't you, Helga? [Helga nods smilingly at him.]

JUDGE: Did she return it to you?

GUDMUND: You didn't, did you, Helga? [Helga shakes her head.] Our guests came very soon, and Helga went away that afternoon.

JUDGE: Is this the knife you lent her?

GUDMUND: It is. [He takes it in his hand and opens the two blades.] Neither blade broken—[with a boyish chuckle that breaks into something like a sob] I didn't stick the Outlander, did I?

HELGA: Of course you didn't. We all knew that.

JUDGE [to Erland]: Can you swear to it, as your son's knife? [Shows it to Erland.]

ERLAND: I can— O, your Honor— [His voice breaks, he turns abruptly from the Judge, goes to Gudmund, puts both arms around him and conceals his face against Gudmund's arm.]

GUDMUND [patting Erland's shoulder]: It's all right now, Father. I didn't kill him, so, of course—

ERLAND: No, thank God! You didn't kill him.

GUDMUND: But who did? Not Thorwald or Hugo, surely.

JUDGE [who has been ostentatiously looking away from them, with a softened expression on his keen face]: That we shall see. But this clears you, Gudmund. When you have signed this paper, binding you to appear as witness at the trial, you may go home. [Helga clasps her hands in an ecstasy of happiness.]

GUDMUND [in a shaken voice]: I thank your Honor.

JUDGE [who has been scribbling on a blank form, pushes it toward Gudmund and puts a pen in his hand]: It is Helga whom you must thank.

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GUDMUND [*signing the paper and clasping Helga's hand*]: I do thank her from my heart.

[Enter Martensson. *Seeing Gudmund and Helga, he hesitates at the door.*]

JUDGE: Come in, Martensson. Can you wait a few moments? I will not keep you long, but some unexpected matters in connection with this case have delayed me.

MARTENSSON [*half sullenly*]: I would rather come back later.

ERLAND: I will wait, your Honor. Shall we go into the next room?

JUDGE: Thank you, Erland. But you need not withdraw. [Erland, Gudmund and Helga seat themselves. Martensson approaches the table.] Now, Martensson, all I want of you is to find out what took place between the pedlar and the three young gentlemen while you were with them. Try to remember exactly.

MARTENSSON [*after a pause, as if endeavoring to recollect*]: The young gentlemen insulted the pedlar several times—at least Gudmund Erlandsson did.

JUDGE: What did he say?

MARTENSSON: "Keep your distance, Isaac, I can smell you from here," was one thing.

JUDGE: What else?

MARTENSSON: "You may be honest, but you're not decent," I think, or something like that.

JUDGE: Did the pedlar reply to these insults?

MARTENSSON: I didn't notice that he did.

JUDGE: Did either of the others address the pedlar?

MARTENSSON: I think not.

JUDGE: Try to remember what else was said. Gudmund has been cleared of the deed, so we must find some other clue.

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MARTENSSON [*startled*]: Cleared?

JUDGE [*darting a swift glance at him*]: Yes. Why not?

MARTENSSON [*sullenly*]: How has he been cleared?

ERLAND [*coming forward*]: Your Honor, may I give you my evidence now? I wish Martensson to hear it.

JUDGE: Sit down, Martensson. Say what you know, Erland.

ERLAND: Last night, from my window, I saw someone passing our house throw into the marsh opposite a small object. This was at one o'clock, for I heard the chimes as I was getting back into bed.

JUDGE: A small object? Perhaps a cigar stump.

ERLAND: It seemed heavier than that. I thought nothing of this circumstance until this morning when Gudmund told us about the knife. Then I went into the marsh, where I thought it might have fallen, and caught on a hummock, I found—this. [*He takes a knife from his pocket and lays it before the Judge. The Judge examines it in silence, while the Constable comes from the door and leans over the table to look, too. Martensson half starts from his seat, but sits back again with an obvious effort.*]

JUDGE: An M- on the handle—mmmm— Did you recognize the man who threw the knife?

ERLAND: Yes. [*Looking straight at Martensson.*] The moon was bright and I saw—Per Martensson.

MARTENSSON [*springing from his chair*]: It's a lie!

JUDGE [*sternly*]: Sit down, Martensson. You can defend yourself in due time. [*He makes a sign to the Constable, who goes over and stands near Martensson. Then he unlocks a drawer of the desk, takes from it a small object wrapped in paper, and fits it with the knife. With an expression of solemn exultation, he holds the knife and*

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the blade together, raising them above the table, so that all present may see.]

CONSTABLE [in his excitement moving closer to see]: By glory! [Martensson makes a dash for the door.]

JUDGE: Arrest him! [Constable pursues Martensson through the door. Helga covers her face with her hands and turns away.]

ERLAND [involuntarily]: Poor fellow!

GUDMUND [perplexed]: But I don't understand—

JUDGE: It will all be cleared up at the trial. [He rises with papers in his hand and shakes hands with Helga.] Good-bye, my child. Are you going back to Närlunda, now?

HELGA: No, your Honor.

GUDMUND [authoritatively]: Yes, Helga, you are coming home with me.

HELGA: No, Gudmund, I shall go to the Marsh Croft. [To the Judge.] Mother Ingeborg has given me weaving to do at my home.

JUDGE: That is good. Come to me, if you should need help at any time.

HELGA: I thank your Honor. [Enter Constable, puffing and blowing.]

CONSTABLE: I caught him, your Honor, just at the door of the jail. He's locked up tight enough now.

JUDGE: Thank you, Constable. Bring the girl Olga this afternoon at two— [Exeunt together, the Judge still talking.]

ERLAND [shaking hands with Helga]: Helga, my child, can you not overlook all that is past, and come home with us again?

HELGA: You have overlooked so much in me Erland Erlandsson, that surely I— But I cannot go back to Närlunda.

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GUDMUND [*impetuously*]: You *must* go back, Helga—

HELGA: Oh, do not stay here talking, while Mother Ingeborg weeps at home. Go quickly and tell her that you are free.

ERLAND [*turning to the door*]: I will drive to the door and take you both with me. [*Exit.*]

GUDMUND [*turns to Helga, takes her hands in his and suddenly pulls her to him, clasping her in his arms and kissing her wildly. She pushes him away with a little cry of terror.*]

GUDMUND [*still holding her but ceasing to kiss her*]: Don't push me away, my Helga. It is you I love. Long ago I might have known this.

HELGA [*twisting out of his hold*]: No, no, Gudmund. Don't say so. It is Hildur— You must go to her.

GUDMUND: Hildur! I want nothing from her.

HELGA: Surely you do not mean that, Gudmund.

GUDMUND: Of what are you dreaming? Hildur is done with me. She told me so, herself.

HELGA: But she did not mean it, Gudmund. I am sure she did not mean it. She was so startled with your news that she did not know what she was saying. No doubt she regrets it bitterly at this very moment.

GUDMUND: Let her regret it as much as she likes for all of me! I know her now! She is the sort who thinks only of herself. I'm glad I'm rid of her.

HELGA [*putting out her hand to stop his words*]: Gudmund, you must not speak so of Hildur. Wait till you have seen her—then you will understand.

GUDMUND: I have no intention of seeing her. I want you for my wife. Will you marry me, Helga? [*He tries to take her in his arms again, but she slips out of them.*]

HELGA: No, no, Gudmund. You must not say such

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things to me. Please go. Your father must be at the door.

GUDMUND: Do you not love me, Helga?

HELGA [*hesitatingly*]: Do not ask me, Gudmund. I can't love anyone now.

GUDMUND [*slowly*]: Do you mean since—? Surely you don't care for him, still. [*Helga turns away in silence.*]

GUDMUND [*hoarsely*]: Tell me, Helga. Do you love that—Per Martensson?

HELGA [*with averted face*]: I can't bear to hurt you, Gudmund.

GUDMUND [*after a moment's silence*]: You cannot love a man like that, Helga. You are deceiving yourself.

HELGA [*simply*]: I am not clever enough for that, Gudmund.

GUDMUND [*in a hard voice*]: You love the man who has given you nothing and taken everything! And I—the damned scoundrel!

HELGA [*faintly*]: Why should we speak of him, Gudmund? Go quickly and tell your mother that you are free.

GUDMUND [*with a harsh laugh*]: Free! Yes, I am free. But you—

HELGA [*almost sobbing*]: I am not free and never shall be. Now go— Don't keep her waiting a moment more.

GUDMUND [*after gazing at her fixedly a moment, turns to the door, pausing after he opens it.*] Good-bye then. We must go our separate ways, you and I.

HELGA: Good-bye, Gudmund. [*Exit Gudmund.* Helga stands for an instant with hands clenched at her sides, making a desperate effort for self-control. Then she shakes herself together with a resolute gesture, begins, as at the end of the Prologue, to slip off shoes and stockings,

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and hangs shoes over her shoulder. While she does so, she forces herself to hum in a shaky voice the folksong she sang at the opening of Act I., breaking off several times and swallowing hard to regain her self-control. Finally, she sings more strongly, opens the door, looks out as before, and exit, with an air of more settled cheerfulness.]

CURTAIN.

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

ACT III.

Scene 2.

Half an hour later. The Crossroads. At right front two roads cross. A grassy knoll with a few gnarly trees on it rises gently from their intersection and occupies the greater part of the stage. Behind on the left, the knoll descends and reveals a fjord in the background.

Hildur is disclosed sitting on a low mound a little above the road. She wears her wedding dress, and a long dark cloak over it. She rises and peers anxiously down the road, but when she hears wheels and sees Erland and Gudmund approaching in the cart, she seats herself again on the mound and turns her face away. Gudmund sees her and stops involuntarily, then bows silently and starts the horse again. Erland bows gravely to her, but does not speak. Hildur rises and extends her hands to Gudmund, in an attitude of supplication.

HILDUR [in a faint voice]: Gudmund.

GUDMUND [stopping the horse again]: How do you come here, Hildur?

HILDUR: I would have a word with you.

GUDMUND [indifferently, after a slight pause]: Very well.

ERLAND: I will drive on and tell your mother.

[Gudmund jumps out of the cart and walks toward Hildur, while Erland drives off the stage. Gudmund seats himself at a little distance from Hildur, who has sunk down upon the bank again. He remains silent, gazing off abstractedly down the road. Hildur looks at him and then away again.]

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GUDMUND: Well, Hildur.

HILDUR [*begins to speak after a pause and with a perceptible effort*]: I was—yes, it was much too hard—what I said to you this morning.

GUDMUND [*kindly*]: It came upon you so suddenly, Hildur.

HILDUR: I should have thought twice. We could—it would, of course—

GUDMUND: It was to be, Hildur. But you are kind to speak as you do.

HILDUR [*covers her face with her hands, then looks straight at Gudmund*]: No, I am not kind. I was—contemptible, this morning. You see I thought you might be guilty.

GUDMUND: That was natural, I suppose.

HILDUR: No one who loved you, believed it. And I would not believe it now.

GUDMUND [*warmly*]: Would you not, Hildur? I am glad of that. We have all changed much since this morning.

HILDUR: But I did not change of myself, Gudmund. I don't want you to think I am better than I am. Someone has told me that you are innocent.

GUDMUND: Why, how could anyone know? We have but just come from the Judge.

HILDUR [*in a low voice*]: Helga showed me your knife before she took it to town.

GUDMUND: It was Helga, then?

HILDUR: And she urged me to see you at once that I might make things right between us again. I wish I had thought of this before I knew about the knife—but I did not. But I have longed for you all day—and wished that things were with us as they were before this happened.

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GUDMUND: Do not wish that, Hildur. It is probably best as it is.

HILDUR [*puts her hands to her face, draws a breath deep as a sigh, then raises her head again*]: I understand that you can never forget how I behaved to you this morning.

GUDMUND: I shall forget it sooner than you, Hildur. But you must not reproach yourself, for it was really a stroke of good fortune that all has been ended between us.

HILDUR: You think this, Gudmund?

GUDMUND: Yes, for today it has become clear to me that I love someone else; and it would have been a great misfortune to us both if this had come to light after our marriage.

HILDUR: Who is it, Gudmund?

GUDMUND: You would not understand. But I cannot marry her, so the name does not matter.

HILDUR: Why can you not marry her?

GUDMUND: She does not care for me—that is all... But I shall never marry anyone else.

HILDUR [*after a long pause, raising her head proudly*]: I want you to tell me, Gudmund, if it is Helga whom you love.

GUDMUND: Why do you think so?

HILDUR: Because I do understand, better than you think. And if you are speaking of Helga, why do you suppose she came to me and taught me what I should do, that you and I might come together again? She knew you were innocent, but she did not say so to you or to anyone else. She let me know first.

GUDMUND [*looking her steadily in the eyes*]: Do you think this means that she—

HILDUR: You may be sure of it, Gudmund. No one in the world could love you more than she does.

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

GUDMUND [*starting up and walking hurriedly back and forth along the bank*]: And you—why do you tell me this?

HILDUR: Surely I do not want to stand beneath Helga in this too! [*Enter Helga along the road, shoes about her neck. They do not see her and she attempts to hurry by during Gudmund's speech, but Hildur discovers her.*]

GUDMUND [*placing his hands on Hildur's shoulders and shaking her gently*]: Oh, Hildur, you don't know how happy you have made me. You don't know how much I like you!

HILDUR: See, there she is, Gudmund.

GUDMUND [*running to intercept her*]: Helga, oh Helga!

HELGA [*turning to smile at them both*]: May I wish you happiness?

HILDUR [*coming to her and taking her hand*]: I wish you happiness, dear Helga, with all my heart—you and Gudmund.

GUDMUND [*taking her other hand*]: Yes, Helga, you can't escape from me any more.

HELGA [*looks from one to the other, with a questioning gaze, then turns to Hildur*]: But Hildur, why will you not marry Gudmund?

HILDUR [*smiling down at her*]: Because he does not want to marry me, Helga. You would not have him marry me against his will, would you?

HELGA [*looking at Gudmund in utter amazement*]: But surely you can forgive—

GUDMUND [*heartily*]: Indeed, I can!

HILDUR: He has forgiven me, Helga, I am sure. But he does not any longer love me. You can see how that might be.

HELGA [*anxiously searching the faces of both for con-*

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firmation of this statement and finally accepting it with drooping head]: Oh, I am so sorry!

HILDUR [*impulsively putting her arms about Helga*]: What have you done to us, Helga?— I believe,—why, I believe I really want you to marry Gudmund!

GUDMUND: So do I, Helga.

HELGA [*radiant with joy*]: Is it for me, then?— Oh, are you sure? [*She looks from one to the other with child-like appeal.*]

GUDMUND [*tenderly*]: Why not, little one?

HELGA [*seizing upon Hildur in a kind of panic*]: But I'm not fit, Hildur. You know I'm not fit to be mistress of Närlanda.

HILDUR [*sincerely*]: You are fit to be Gudmund's wife and mistress of his house. [*Gudmund reverently kisses Helga's hand.*] Listen, Helga. My veil and crown are at Närlanda. You have given me much and I want you to wear them, at your wedding. Will you? [*Helga puts up her face and Hildur kisses her. The sound of violins, flutes and other musical instruments is heard approaching. Hildur and Helga, startled, draw apart.*]

GUDMUND: It's the bride's escort. No one has told them.

HILDUR: I will tell them.

[*A number of young men on horseback enter, followed by a carriage containing several musicians with their instruments.* One of the riders leads a beautiful horse with a woman's saddle on it. Another horse with a man's saddle on it is led by another rider. The men are in Swedish costume, their hats decorated with ribbons of bright colors and with flowers. Some of them carry guns. The first riders stop as they see Hildur and signal to the musicians to cease.*]

*The escort and the musicians may be on foot, if necessary. If horses are dispensed with, the speeches referring to them must be altered.

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

1ST RIDER: Why, here is the bride. A joyous wedding to you, Hildur.

2ND RIDER: Have you come so early from Närlunda? We were to fetch you thence at twelve.

OTHER RIDERS: Good luck to Gudmund and Hildur! Good luck! Good luck!

HILDUR [*raising her hand as if to push away their words*]: Thank you, my friends. We have come from Närlunda, it is true. But I am not the bride today. Here she is. [*She takes Helga's hand and draws her forward. Helga clings close to her and looks down in confusion.*]

1ST RIDER: What?

2ND RIDER: Has Gudmund married Helga?

HILDUR: Not yet. But they go now to Närlunda for the wedding.

1ST RIDER: Are you playing pranks with us, you two?

2ND RIDER: Has there been no wedding at Närlunda?

1ST RIDER: What do you mean? [*They crowd close about Hildur and become very still. Gudmund steps forward. Thorwald enters, unobserved, and stands in view of the audience, listening.*]

GUDMUND: It means that there has been no wedding at Närlunda. Hildur has decided not to marry me, after all. [*Murmurs of incredulity and disapproval from the crowd. Thorwald steps forward and confronts Gudmund.*]

THORWALD [*hotly*]: Do you accuse Hildur of breaking faith with you?

HILDUR: Let me speak, Gudmund. I will tell them the truth. [*She raises her head proudly and looks straight at Thorwald as she speaks.*]

—Since last night Gudmund has stood in the shadow

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

of disgrace and death.—And I would not stand there with him.—But Helga came and set him free. So they found that they loved one another and today they will be married. [Turning to the escort.] Give Helga a salute with your guns and then escort her to Närlunda. [Thorwald stands gazing at Hildur as if in a dream. After an instant of amazement, the escort fires a salute. All the riders and musicians doff their hats to Hildur, and the rider who leads the unmounted horse, approaches Helga. Dismounting, he holds the two horses while Gudmund swings Helga into the saddle. Gudmund kisses Hildur's hand and mounts beside Helga. The horsemen surround Gudmund and Helga. Thorwald moves toward Hildur.]

GUDMUND: But you, Hildur? You will come with us, will you not?

1ST RIDER [dismounting]: Will you not mount with me, gracious Hildur? My horse has often carried double.

THORWALD [pushing impatiently forward]: If only you would walk with me!

HILDUR [smiling at him and giving him her hand, which he kisses, then turning to the First Rider]: Thank you, my friend. But I think I would rather walk.

THORWALD [exultantly, to the horsemen, still holding Hildur's hand]: We will follow you to Närlunda.

[At a signal from the 1st Rider the musicians strike up and exeunt before the riders, who fire another salute, and then sing:

Safe shall we lead her,
The bride of thy choosing,
From all ill defend her,
To thy hands commit her,
O bridegroom triumphant.

THE GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

[*While they sing the first two lines, Hildur and Thorwald exeunt in close converse in the wake of the musicians. At the end of the fourth line the riders gallop off the stage, still singing.*]

CURTAIN.

THE FUNERAL

THE FUNERAL

An episode from an unfinished novel
THE BEGINNER

There was a great funeral in Forsythe that afternoon. The late Mr. Ira Cox had been wont to boast that his name spelled more dollars with fewer letters than that of any other man in town. He had been sole owner and manager of three of Forsythe's cardiac enterprises,—the *Morning Gazette*, the Cox Windmill Company and the Gilt-Edge Creamery.

Before the hour set for the funeral the employees of these three companies gathered outside their respective places of business and marched in a body to the church. Gurney, passing the three groups, one after another, noted their clumsy suits of borrowed black, their non-committal expressions of decorous self-importance, and wondered cynically how they really felt. Did they excuse to themselves now Ira Cox's hardness and his greed, perhaps even swelling a little over what a good business man he had been—at their expense? Or did they hate him dead as they had hated and feared him living?

Two of the oldest printers bore between them a creation of the florist's art representing in black and white immortelles the first page of the *Gazette* as it had appeared on the morning of Mr. Cox's death, with each of its columns heavily black leaded. Two of the veteran piece-men in the Windmill factory, whose wages, Gurney

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happened to know, had not in twenty-two years risen above ten dollars a week, carried an equally appropriate and even more imposing replica of a Cox windmill done in white carnations and candy-tuft,—“pump handle and all complete,” as admiring spectators noted. These triumphs were inspected with pride by all the contributors thereto, but the employees of the Gilt-Edge Creamery felt that their committee had discharged its office in a poor and unimaginative spirit with the purchase of a plump pillow of white roses lettered I. C. in purple violets.

At the head of Main Street Professor Gurney overtook Dr. Fowler, and the two were soon joined by Professor Rawley, the Seminary gossip, who emerged from his doorway with news exuding from every pore. He was a bald, florid, bustling little man, impatient of ceremonies.

“Heard about the old rascalion’s will?” he demanded without salutation. The tips of his stiff mustache bristled with importance and indignation.

“No,” answered Dr. Fowler tranquilly. “Has any one?”

“Ah, how d’ye do, Rawley,” broke in Gurney maliciously. Rawley did not waste a look on him.

“Everybody knows. It was read this morning. He had it endorsed to be read on the morning of the funeral. Jim Leavens says he told him that his poor relations had no call to camp down in his house for the best part of a week waiting to hear the will,—the old skeezicks!”

“I take it he has cut the Seminary off with a shilling?”

“Yes. How did you know? I thought you hadn’t heard.”

“I hadn’t, till you told me. —I mean,” he hastened to add, seeing Rawley’s blank expression and Gurney’s

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twinkle of appreciation,— “I guessed it from what you said. Where does the money go?”

“To the widow—every nickel. Did you ever hear anything so outrageous—so unprincipled?”

“Well, I don’t know. What do you say, Gurney?”

“It’s like the old chap, isn’t it? A good deal of a practical joker.”

“If you call this a joke—”, exploded Rawley.

“Well,” conceded Dr. Fowler, placably, “no doubt he knew why he was made a trustee.”

“Well, if he did, wouldn’t a decent sense of honor lead him to satisfy the expectations he had raised, yes, repeatedly raised? You know as well as I do how many times he has refused to contribute a dollar to some crying need of ours and how invariably he has put us off with ‘When I am gone, you’ll see that I haven’t forgotten the Seminary’. You’ve heard him, time and again. And now—it’s false pretenses, or something worse. I hope the trustees will break the will.”

“I don’t just see on what grounds.”

“Well, a lawyer could see. And I hope they’ll consult one. Oh, there’s Dempsey.” And he shot off without a word of farewell as the lank, drooping figure of the professor of homiletics turned into the street just before them. Hawley bobbed up and down beside him, “like corn on a hot shovel” as Gurney observed, occasionally seeming to pop with indignation.

“Too bad to stir Dempsey up just before preaching,” he commented further.

“No doubt he’s heard it before,” Dr. Fowler assured him. “I imagine from the way he shakes his head, that Rawley is talking about contesting the will. I don’t wonder he’s so hot, poor chap. It’s one under the belt for the Seminary.”

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"And how it does serve us good and right," observed Gurney.

"It does that. Providence really couldn't lose a chance like this for a moral lesson. Any self-respecting secular college would have hesitated to put him on its board of trustees; but a theological seminary has no sense of humor."

They had reached the church, which was fast filling with towns people, theological students and faculty. Dr. Fowler was seated next to President Hampson, who wore his customary expression of aristocratic boredom. Mrs. Hampson leaned forward and scintillated an individual greeting from her eyes to each of the two men. She made a point of marked cordiality to those who were in her husband's bad books. Was not this the whole duty of a president's wife,—to keep things socially pleasant, whatever the necessities of official discipline might be?

Across the aisle from them and a little in front of the mourner's pew was Mrs. Cox, quite alone except for an old woman servant. The poor relatives had unanimously left town, it would seem, after the reading of the will. The widow's rotund person gave no effect of being bowed by grief. Her brilliant cheeks glowed even through the dense crepe veil. Gurney, watching her from behind, was teased by the same question that the faces of the gathered employees had suggested. How did she really feel? But no satisfying answer was written in the trim crepe-bound lines of the erect figure, the slightly lifted head, the straight-forward gaze of the eyes toward the coffin and the pulpit above it.

The preliminaries of hymn-reading and prayer fell to the lot of the Reverend Dr. Henry Runciman, the pastor of the church. His large, thick-featured face, hung with flabby folds of sodden flesh, wore an expression

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of studied sweetness, as it would say, "Behold how a manly man bows his strength to become as a little child in the kingdom." He prayed that on this sad occasion our hearts might be opened to receive their lesson, namely that Death is no respecter of persons. Rich and poor, high and low, old and young, he spares none. Our time may be tomorrow—even tonight the Death Angel may knock at our door. Are we ready? Help us to answer, each for himself, this solemn question. Help us to be ready, to keep our light trimmed and burning. Help us to learn the lessons of the life that has passed from our midst, to note how often, as in the case of our brother, great, even surpassing, business ability is joined with the highest integrity of character, with unfailing respect for God's laws and institutions, with regular attendance upon the means of grace. Our departed brother was no less a business man for those admirable qualities,—nay rather a greater financial success and a nobler example to our youth. Success is gained not by transgressing but by obeying God's laws. May we all remember this and be better men and women for this lesson. Bless and comfort the heart of the sorrowing widow, that dear wife who made a happy home and place of refuge for our brother from the heat and burden of the business day. May she be enabled to look through her tears to a happy reunion in the land where there is no night and no parting forever.

And then he prayed it all over again in partly different words and sat down while the choir sang "Crossing the Bar," covering his large fat face with a large fat hand, the stumpy fingers radiating upward to the edges of his fluted hair.

Then Professor Dempsey uncoiled himself and stood behind the desk, silent for a long moment while he looked

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at the audience as if it were not there. His slender figure had the tenseness of a bent bow. His eyes were caverns of smouldering protest.

"We are gathered here," he began, in an intense, smothered voice, which grew clearer and higher as he went on, "to perform the last rites for one who has often been denominated the foremost citizen of Forsythe." In crisp, pictorial sentences, as unlike as possible to his usual flamboyant circumlocutions, he narrated the events of Ira Cox's early life; how he had at the age of ten run away from a stepmother who had systematically ill-treated him, and begun his business career on the streets of Forsythe by selling matches obtained on credit from a friendly elder boy; how he had risen from matches to newspapers, thence to the proprietorship of a news-stand, thence to reporting on the *Gazette* and finally to its management and ownership, with the control of the town's two most important industries. "At the time of his death,"—the words came more slowly now, as if dragging behind them some weighty meaning,—"he was paying to more than twelve hundred inhabitants of Forsythe, men, women and children, the wages which bought their daily bread. He was thus, in wealth and in the power which wealth brings, our foremost citizen."

The speaker paused, until every eye in the congregation fixed itself upon him. Then a swift challenge shot from his somber eyes to theirs.

"But in the house of God and in the presence of God, I ask you, what more than this can we say for Ira Cox, our foremost citizen? Was he foremost in all that makes a man truly useful in his life and truly lamented at his death? Who among you will answer yes?"

President Hampson glanced uneasily away from the speaker and then back to him again, gradually steeling

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his face into an expression of aloofness and irresponsibility, faintly tinged by surprise. Mrs. Cox had paled suddenly and her rotund figure had wavered a little, before it stiffened determinedly into the lines of her previous attitude. She had given a swift involuntary glance at the vestry door, as if meditating flight, but checking the impulse, had forced her eyes again to the speaker's face. Thus she sat, as one searing sentence followed another, her cheeks and lips bloodless in the intensity of her listening, rigidly upright under the lashings of Dempsey's words and the glances that leaped upon her from every quarter of the church.

"He had such power," the vibrant Celtic voice went on, "over the lives of other human beings as few men wield. Did he use it for their welfare and happiness, for the glory of a compassionate God? We pass over his business dealings, since this great game of business is supposed by those who play it successfully to have its own rules, apart from and inconsistent with the laws of human kindness. Yet the game was here in Forsythe largely in the hands of Ira Cox, and its rules might have been so modified by him as to yield him profits only a little smaller and his employees a living wage. If he had sometimes, in his prosperity, remembered the little boy who sold matches and slept in the streets at night, who was never warm or well-fed until he had wrested these goods from the hands of a hostile world, would he not have been, perhaps, content with slower gains? If he had remembered what his young eyes saw of the life of the poor, would he not have endeavored, even at some small sacrifice of mere money, to put color into the faces of the women who worked for him, and to lift from men's shoulders the intolerable burden of daily anxiety lest the bare bread of poverty should fail? But none of these

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things were by-products of the business enterprises carried on by Ira Cox in this town. They made money, but they made no strong and self-respecting men, no intelligent and hopeful women, no happy children. Do we ask too much of business, do you say, in asking these fruits from it? In your hearts you know that this is not true. This is what business exists for, not to enrich one man while it impoverishes and enslaves the many. Business is, like all the rest of life, our Father's business.

"This truth, however, Ira Cox never, in his earthly life, came to know. Nor did he understand the true values of life outside of his business relations. I search my memory in vain, and I have in vain searched the memories of other men who knew him well, for one instance of public-spirited benevolence performed by him, for one offering made out of his abundance to relieve the necessities, or to lessen the hardships of any other human being. Can any one here recall such an instance? If so, in God's name let him speak. Is there in this congregation a young man who owes to Ira Cox his education or his start in a business career? Or one whom Ira Cox's kindly counsel saved at a moment of sore temptation and need? If there be any such in this audience, I conjure him to rise and let us know that this man's life was not lived in vain."

The speaker paused in a tingling silence and looked searchingly over the audience, from pew to pew, over the lower floor, then along the galleries. At length he dropped his eyes with a low sigh of relinquished expectation.

"Is there no one? Is there not, then, perhaps, a man to whom Ira Cox once lent a helping hand when ill health and discouragement were dragging him down to failure? Is there not some one who can say out of a full

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heart, 'The man who lies in yonder coffin gave me courage to go on in the darkest hour of my grief, by a warm clasp of the hand, a word of genuine sympathy?" "

Again the long pause, and the slow searching of the audience, the disappointed relinquishment of the quest.

"Cannot some widow here rise and tell us that in the anguish of her bereavement and her apprehension for the future, Ira Cox came to her, giving her time for the payment of her mortgage and offering her work or temporary aid to keep the family together? Will not even some child recall a punishment remitted or the tears of fright wiped away by this man who can never now lighten the grief of any? Surely no one here would hesitate to rise in his place in defense of one who is forever silent.—But no one speaks— There is no one who can honestly say that this man, living all but the first ten of his seventy-two years in this community, has enriched it by one word or deed of loving-kindness. The wealthiest and the most powerful man in Forsythe, he has gone out from among us, leaving no monument but one of granite in yonder cemetery. Poorer than that of many a humble man or woman whose life 'smells sweet and blossoms in the dust,' his spirit has been summoned to the bar of eternal justice. May God have mercy upon it."

He stood for a moment with eyes that looked beyond the audience, and then dropped quietly into his seat. The Reverend Dr. Henry Runciman arose with a perturbed air, his child-like sweetness temporarily obscured, while in a voice which did not quite succeed in sounding as if nothing had happened, he read the closing hymn, "How Firm a Foundation". It rose feebly from the congregation at first, but soon swelled into tremendous volume, as if the familiar words and tune had put solid ground under foot once more in a world strangely shaken.

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Then the unprotesting body of Ira Cox was borne out, followed by those who were to attend it to the grave, and the audience melted away, moved by a common, unacknowledged impulse to tell the tale to those who were not present and to gain time for reflection before committing themselves to an opinion upon it.

Dr. Fowler made his way out of the church before the Hampsons could detain him. He knew the President's practice of saving his own mental energies by getting some radical's view of any current event and then setting his own opinion in the opposite direction. Linking his arm into Gurney's, he said no word until they stood at his own gate. Then,

"What do you make of it, Ned?" he asked abruptly.

"It was certainly a magnificent exhibition of courage," answered Gurney. "And every word he said was true. I suppose it does us good to hear harsh truth sometimes."

"Speaking the truth in love," mused Dr. Fowler. "I wonder if it really does good, spoken in any other spirit?"

Gurney made no answer.

"Would he have preached that sermon, do you think," pursued Dr. Fowler, "if Cox had left a hundred thousand to the Seminary?"

"No, I can't think he would have seen it all so clearly," admitted Gurney.

"And the suffering of that defenceless little widow, impaled on all those eyes,—" Dr. Fowler left his sentence unfinished as Ellen ran down the steps and approached them.

"How do you do, Professor Gurney?" she called. "Won't you come in and have dinner with us? We're going to have fried chicken."

The mask of the clown slipped down over Gurney's face. He smacked his lips appreciatively.

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"I just wish I could, Ellen; but little Lovejoy is coming to supper with me—if he keeps his courage up till six o'clock—and it wouldn't do for me to turn up missing."

"O well, some other time," said Ellen easily.

"When you have fried chicken," agreed Gurney longingly. "Do you have it every day?"

Ellen laughed at him and turned toward the house with her father. At dinner he told her and Courtney the story of the funeral. Their comments and questions were in full tide when Mrs. Cox was announced, "to see Dr. Fowler on a matter of business."

She sat very upright in one of the padded library chairs, dressed as she had been in the afternoon. Her eyes, however, were swollen with weeping and her round cheeks were almost colorless.

"I s'pose you're surprised to see me, Dr. Fowler," she said, with an attempt at sprightliness.

"I am very glad to see you, Mrs. Cox," answered Dr. Fowler heartily. "I hope there is something I can do for you."

"Yes, there is." Mrs. Cox was visibly relieved at this opening. "You heard what that man said this afternoon."

Dr. Fowler nodded.

"Well, he had no right to say it." Color began to burn darkly in her firm cheeks. "It was true, of course. But there was more to it."

"I thought there must be more," said Dr. Fowler.

"There was," asserted Mrs. Cox fiercely. "And that pin-headed fellow had no call to say what he did against Iry. Iry didn't want to be like that. But he didn't know how to act different. He never let on to me, but I knew it. He wanted folks to look up to him and he

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was top of the heap, but they didn't. He knew they didn't. And now he's dead—" Her voice broke, but her eyes were quite dry.

"I'm sure what you say of him is true," Dr. Fowler said gently. "I wish we could have helped him more."

She searched his eyes dumbly, then nodded to herself as if satisfied.

"Most likely nobody could," she declared, hopelessly. "But I'm not goin' to have him spit on now by them that licked his hands when he had money to give." She was fierce again in her maternal attitude of defense. "I'm goin' to give all his money to the Seminary to be a memorial to him, and show up that pin-headed feller for a liar. But I ain't goin' to give them a penny of it without they kick him out and that stick o' wood of a president that backs him up."

Dr. Fowler sat dazed in a torrent of new ideas. Mrs. Cox watched him anxiously.

"I kin do it, kin't I?" she asked at length, since he did not speak.

"Yes," said Dr. Fowler, rousing himself, with a half-audible sigh. "You can do it, quite legally, no doubt. There is nothing to prevent your making any conditions you choose."

"Then I'm goin' to do it. There ain't no sense in my havin' such a pile of money myself. I couldn't spend it. I don't know how. I'm fifty years old now. When I was young I could of learned, and mebbe I would of liked it. But I've learned to live close now, and I couldn't live no other way. And there's some, old as I be, would marry me for the money."

"Not if you see the possibility so clearly, I imagine." Dr. Fowler's voice showed no glint of amusement.

"Well, I wouldn't risk it. I'm as like as any other

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woman to be made a fool of. I can have all I want on five hundred thousand, and the Seminary can have the million and odd, if they do what I say. Will you make out the papers, Dr. Fowler? I want it put straight to them. They must fire Dempsey and Hampson and I want they should make you president."

Dr. Fowler sat very still for a moment. Then he said slowly, "I thank you for thinking of that, Mrs. Cox. But the fact is, I don't want to be president. There's nothing in it but the name. And I don't care a fig for that."

"Oh," ejaculated Mrs. Cox, disappointedly.

"And besides," went on Dr. Fowler still gently, "I couldn't take it, you know, if it were bought for me. If the trustees and faculty and students all thought I was the best man, without being bribed to think so, I might take it, even though I'd rather teach. But that's not in the question."

Mrs. Cox brooded darkly. "Most people'd jump at it," she opined.

Dr. Fowler did not discuss the point.

"Do you mean you won't take it, even if I put it in the papers?" she persisted.

"I mean just that. But I'll write the letter to the trustees, if you like, which you can sign, stating the amount you wish to give and the terms of the gift. A lawyer will have to make the deed of gift, of course."

"Well," conceded Mrs. Cox. "But will you see that he says what I want him to?"

"I'll tell you if he hasn't said what you want, if you show the deed to me before signing it."

"Look here." Mrs. Cox emerged with a jerk from a darkened silence. "There's something you don't like about this, and I don't know what it is."

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Dr. Fowler nodded acquiescence, but did not speak.

"Ain't it a good thing," she demanded, "to use Iry's money for a memorial to him and throw that feller's lies back in his teeth?"

"I think it's a fine thing, Mrs. Cox, to make us remember him by such a gift. And I agree with you that it's the sort of thing Mr. Cox would have liked to do, if he had known how. But why do you choose the Seminary rather than any other institution?"

"Why it's the only thing he was ever trustee of. Of course I could build a big hospital or something. But if I give it to the Seminary, I can make them fire Dempsey and Hampson."

"Yes." Dr. Fowler's voice was so low that she had to lean forward in her chair to catch his words. "But is that the kind of memorial you want to leave for Mr. Cox? He was not a mean man or a revengeful man."

"No, he wa'nt. But that skunk Dempsey—I'll get even with him, if I spend the last cent of Iry's money."

"Think it over, Mrs. Cox, will you? What if you should get 'way ahead of him, instead of merely even with him? And I can't think of anything better for that than to give this money to the Seminary without any conditions, unless, perhaps, you wanted to provide that the name be changed to the Cox Theological Seminary."

"Dr. Fowler, you're workin' me," accused Mrs. Cox. Dr. Fowler laughed,

"No, Mrs. Cox, I'm not, unless you choose to be worked. I'm only giving you the advice I'd like to have somebody give me in the same place. It's nothing to me, you know, one way or another. But I wish you'd think it over, to-night."

"Now, Dr. Fowler, you don't reely think I'm goin' to

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take that skunk's back-talk aginst Iry, and hand him out a boquet for it. That ain't common sense."

"It seems to me like uncommon sense, though. I believe it would set Mr. Cox's name higher in the community than any gift that had a touch of spite in it."

"Why they might even think he got the money for the Seminary by his low-down talk," expostulated Mrs. Cox.

"No, I hardly think so. You see it's not the usual way of meeting an unkindness. And Mr. Cox so often spoke of leaving the Seminary something in his will, that I should think you would be quite justified in saying that you give the money to carry out intentions which he had frequently expressed. I'll put that in the letter if you like."

Mrs. Cox gripped the arms of her chair. "Land sakes, Dr. Fowler, you certainly had ought to be president of something. I declare I have to take a holt of my chair to keep from saying aye, yes and no, just as you want me to. But I ain't goin' to give up seein' Dempsey squirm, no, I kin tell you."

"If I were Dempsey, I think I should squirm more if you gave the money over my head, so to speak," declared Dr. Fowler, with a chuckle. "Anyhow, it's a memorial to Mr. Cox, isn't it? and not to what Dempsey has said or hasn't said. But don't say aye, yes or no now. Think it over till morning and let me know."

"Well, I'll think it over," promised Mrs. Cox, rising from her chair. "But I don't guess I'll see it your way when I'm by myself."

"All right, Mrs. Cox," as they shook hands vigorously. "You must see it in your own way. But I know you'll see it straight."

Before breakfast the next morning, Mamie brought up

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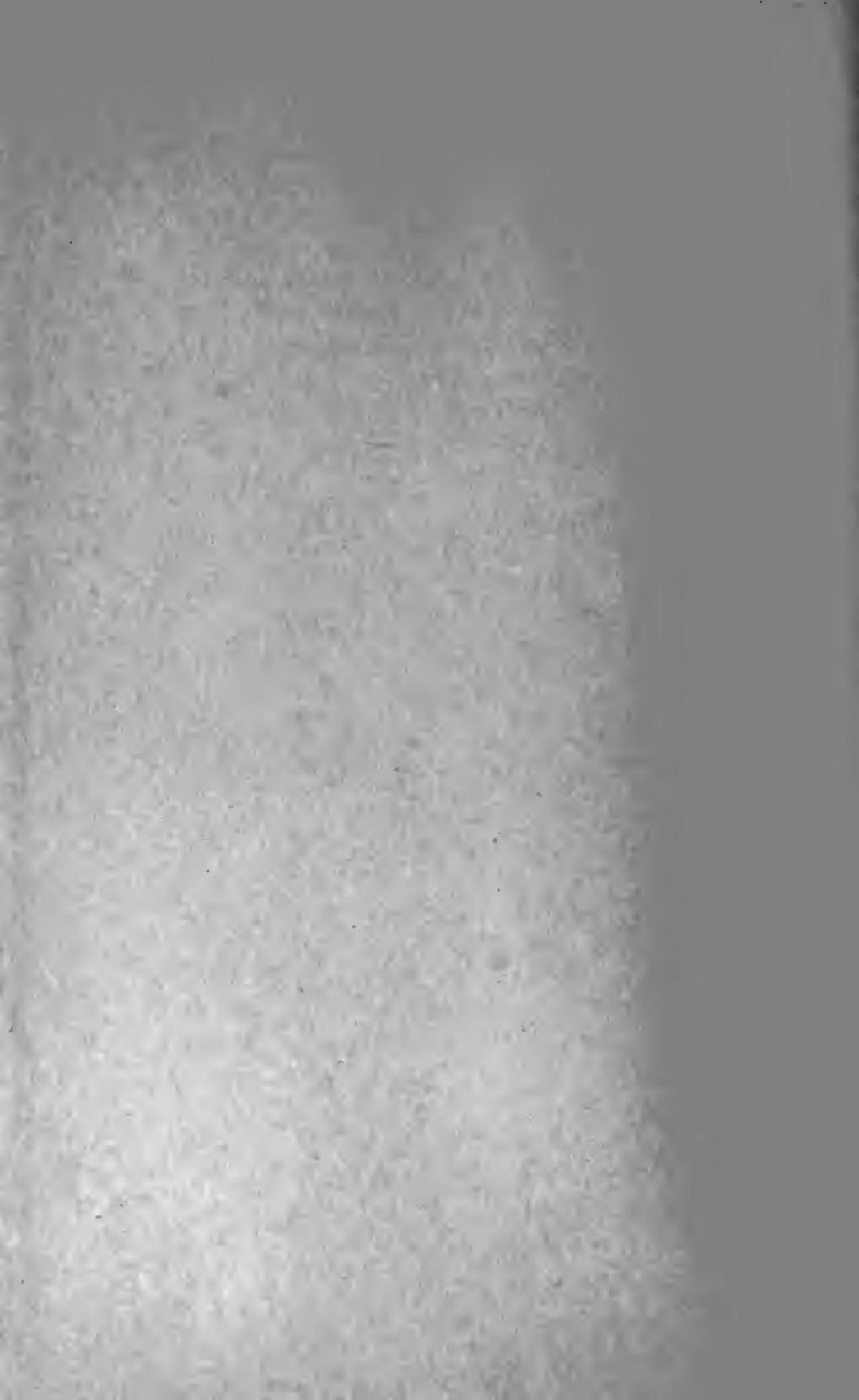
to Dr. Fowler a note which she said Mrs. Cox had left at the door. It ran thus:

"Dr. Fowler. Dear Friend.

I expect your right. I don't want anybody to think Ira was mean. Maybe Dempsey will feel worst this way. You can say in the letter they can have it if they call it Cox Theological Seminary. Thanks very much.

Respectfully,

Mrs. Minnie J. Cox."





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